Fighting for Patronage:
American counterinsurgency and the Afghan Local Police

AZIZ AHMED HAKIMI

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Department of Development Studies

School of Oriental and African Studies

University of London

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence and evolution of the Afghan Local Police (ALP), a pro-government militia supported by the US military as an entry point for exploring the fluid security and political terrain of post-2001 Afghanistan. The study reveals how the ALP emerged as a compromise between the US ambition to scale up the use of local militias and the Afghan president's attempts to control the local armed groups and the flow of patronage that the US support to these groups represented. The existing literature on the ALP is highly normative and based on limited empirical evidence. Applying the extended case method, this thesis documents the processes through which the ALP was established in three Afghan provinces: Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz. It demonstrates that the impact of the programme was not unequivocal; the varied outcomes depending on how the programme intersected with local political landscapes. In Wardak, an already fragmented military context was further exacerbated by the injection of US-backed militias, negatively affecting local security. In Baghlan, the ALP emerged as a vehicle for politically marginalised Pashtun groups to re-negotiate Jamiat and Tajik dominance of provincial power structures. In Kunduz, the ALP was appropriated by a Jamiat-led coalition of local commanders and served to preserve the political status quo.

This research is the first historically situated, empirically grounded analysis of the role played by militias in local conflicts and processes of state formation in post-2001 Afghanistan. It builds on newer and older debates in historical political economy literature and a range of disciplines in the social sciences about the intertwined relationship between coercion, resources, and patrimonial politics in processes of state formation, and the problems that a historicised political economy approach emphasising the violent foundation of the state raises for liberal understandings of the state. Through a consideration of Afghanistan's modern history and a detailed analysis of the role played by local militias in the political dynamics of three provincial settings, this thesis foregrounds the centrality of violence, transnational resource flows, and elite bargaining to the emergence of state structures in post-2001 Afghanistan. It makes important theoretical and empirical contributions to an expanding body of literature on violence, local militias, policing, and the contentious politics of statebuilding.

Contents

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I. All the president's strongmen

The growing strength of the Taliban-led insurgency, coupled with Kabul's increased reliance on former mujahedin strongmen and their militias as a bulwark against the insurgents have intensified concerns about the stability of the post-2001 political order. The steady brutalisation of the war and growing insecurity has provided the pretext to justify the arming of militias by US/NATO forces, the Afghan state, or regional strongmen. Part of attempts to augment hard-pressed regular forces, the remobilisation of militias and periodic rearmament since 2001 have been viewed by many as a risky strategy, potentially exacerbating the decentralisation of violence and local conflict dynamics that marked the preceding war years in the 1980s and 1990s. A negative spiral of competitive rearmament has occurred, particularly in the north because of ongoing power struggles between rival armed groups and concerns about a chaotic post-2014 military scenario linked to the withdrawal of foreign forces and the growth of the insurgency.

The departure of NATO forces, beginning in 2011, was partly justified on the grounds that the newly trained Afghan security forces, including local defence groups had grown strong enough to assume security and combat responsibilities from foreign forces by 2014. In the past decade, much of the international effort and funding have been focused on bureaucratising the means of violence, including by disarming war-time militias and building up the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the army and police. At the same time, there has been a parallel set of NATO and Afghan government experiments in deploying private security companies and arming militias under the Afghan Local Police (ALP) programme in order to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level. However, in late 2014 and early 2015 the validity of such assumptions were seriously put to the test when the insurgents intensified military pressure on Afghan security forces in the north; the fighting in Kunduz was particularly fierce and Taliban fighters came close to overrunning the provincial capital and capturing a number of strategic districts, seriously shaking Afghan and international confidence in the regular army and police

forces as well as local militias labelled as ALP. As deficiencies in the ANSF and ALP were once again exposed, the central government turned to former mujahedin commanders and regional strongmen and attempted to arm factional militias to contain the insurgency in the north.

Recent changes in the political economy of the US-led War on Terror and the proliferation of government-backed militias have important implications for political stability, as previously noted. The Bonn-mandated political settlement was essentially an 'elite pact' among US-backed, anti-Taliban armed groups and bankrolled by the resource flows tied to the international war-and-aid economy. The withdrawal of foreign forces[1] and decline in international military and development spending, coupled with the Afghan government's increased reliance on local militias to contain the insurgency, necessitating the remobilisation of militias on an even bigger scale, will most likely result in some adjustments to the existing 'elite bargain' and the balance of power among the contending groups in potentially destabilising ways. This obviously has implications for the political settlement that has underpinned the relative stability of the post-2001 Afghan state. It might intensify contestations over access to resources, including government positions, and the control of the means of coercion, as the 2014 presidential election clearly demonstrated.

Warlords and militias have been central to the discussion of statebuilding in post-2001 Afghanistan, given the formulation of centre-periphery relations in terms of a tug-of-war between a weak state centre, supported by international donors, and local strongmen and militia commanders in the periphery, many of whom regained power and the control of political and economic resources as a result of military alliances with US forces to topple the Taliban regime in 2001. In spite of their role in 'liberating' the country and subsequently in reassembling (and dominating) state structures, these men of violence were also treated as spoilers who endangered the statebuilding project and therefore had to be disarmed.

[1] The US and NATO have committed to maintain around 12,000 troops in Afghanistan after 2014.

Historical experiences of state formation and state consolidation suggest that there has been a long-standing symbiotic relationship between men of violence or military entrepreneurs – bandits, warlords, militias, and states. Historicised political economy approaches concerning the role played by violence, militias and patrimonial politics in processes of state formation have questioned the assumption that building a Weberian monopoly over the means of violence is a necessary pre-condition for state formation. Violence devolution, that is when states rely on militias to manage violence by proxy and consolidate power, has frequently been a mode of military development rather than a defective mode of state formation (chapter 2).

Against this background, the role played by different groups of militias, often with shifting loyalty to the state in the security and political dynamics of provincial settings in Afghanistan remains understudied, as there has been few empirically grounded, longue durée analysis of NATO-and-government-backed militias in the context of the post-2001 NATO involvement and Taliban-led insurgency. This research seeks to understand the role of the ALP (and its previous iterations) in local conflict dynamics and the extent to which such groups were insinuated in the processes of state centralisation and state consolidation in the context of US/NATO counterinsurgency and the transition of security responsibilities form Western forces to Afghan security forces.

After 2001, two broad but different political trajectories can be identified in order to explain the shifting logics of the international intervention. Initially, international donors under the liberal paradigm of peacebuilding and statebuilding aimed at the centralisation of power to overcome the decentralisation of coercion and political authority which resulted from US military support to factional leaders at the outset of the intervention as well as the legacy of the mujahedin rule in the 1990s, if only symbolically. But the partial centralisation of power was achieved less by applying the Weberian criteria of the state monopoly over the means of violence through security sector reform, including disarming wartime militias and building up new professional security forces, at least not during the initial years. This was preceded by a wholesale incorporation of local militias into the structures of the ministries of defence and interior both at national level and in the provinces. Armed factions of the Northern Alliance who dominated the Bonn conference on the future of Afghanistan initially resisted attempts by the UN to disarm their militias,

but the question of disarming wartime militias re-emerged in the context of the Bonn Agreement's implementation of a number of landmark political events, including the 2004 constitution and presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

The new constitution introduced a highly centralised presidential system with strong powers to the executive in order to correct the asymmetry of power between the central government and its erstwhile competitors in the periphery, the provincial strongmen, most of whom had strong links to warlords in the cabinet. Disarming militias and bureaucratising coercion through security sector reform, including rebuilding the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) were crucial steps in the post-2001 statebuilding agenda. These efforts coincided with President Karzai's attempts in the early years of the intervention to sideline jihadi leaders and build up an alternative support base around technocrats and reformist ministers in the cabinet (chapter 5). The high level of insecurity and lack of appropriate socio-economic opportunities meant that the UN-led DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) programme was a failure. While warlords and regional strongmen had been integrated into the cabinet and provincial strongmen incorporated their militias into the provincial security structure, mostly the national police force, a large number of local commanders and militiamen were left out to fend for themselves. In essence there were too many armed groups to accommodate in the formal security sector – in most districts the official structure could only accommodate between thirty to fifty policemen. These constituted the so-called 'illegal armed groups' that were subsequently subjected to the DIAG (disarmament of illegal armed groups) programme.

At the same time, ongoing counter-terrorism operations mainly by US forces meant that reliance on local powerbrokers and forming local militias and private security companies continued in the south and east of the country. In other words, while largely symbolic disarmament was going on in the north, US forces were arming local militias in the south and east (Giustozzi 2008). Military alliances with foreign forces empowered provincial strongmen who followed the logic of the war on terror to target both local rivals and former Taliban leaders in an attempt to accumulate more power. Predatory behaviour by US's local allies arguably was a major factor in the emergence of the Taliban-led

insurgency (Gopal 2014a; Dam 2014a). As it happened, this contradictory approach exposed the broader tension between the military objectives of counter-terrorism and the political objectives of statebuilding. As Suhrke noted, from the outset deep-seated contradictions were inherent to the international engagement in Afghanistan, the most fundamental one being the pursuit of peace whilst waging war (Suhrke 2012). This clearly manifested itself in the sphere of policing in the form of tensions between a US focus on paramilitary policing in order to pursue the war and a European focus on civilian policing in order to consolidate the peace (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). The empirical chapters show that the underlying structural conditions that explain the continued persistence of illegal militias, far from being transformed, have consolidated over time.

From mid-2000s onward, the discourse of 'good governance' and bureaucratising coercion increasingly shifted toward decentralised, local governance and kill-capture operations in the context of a revamped counterinsurgency campaign. As the insurgency and disillusionment with the central government intensified, deficiencies in the regular forces became apparent, prompting NATO forces to increasingly rely on irregular self-defence forces as a stopgap and compensatory measure. This move coincided with President Karzai's decision to rehabilitate jihadi leaders and increase reliance on local strongmen due to the imperatives of presidential and parliamentary elections and the growing Taliban insurgency. Over time the reliance on local militias and private security companies increased and became an implicit, though not uncontested part of formal policy whereby US and NATO forces worked with government ministries and provincial administrations as well as jihadi commanders and powerbrokers to create local defence groups in order to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level, including for NATO bases and supply convoys (chapter 5).

This paralleled the 2009 military surge, the additional deployment of thousands of foreign forces as part of the expanded counterinsurgency campaign under Gen. Stanley McChrystal and later, Gen. David Petraeus. This initial short-term supplementary measure to address local security concerns increasingly took the appearance of a permanent solution. When US-and-NATO-backed local militias were formalised under the ALP framework in 2010, the initial plan was to arm around ten thousand militias, but a year later the number was

increased to twenty thousand. As the looming deadline (end of 2014) for the departure of foreign forces got nearer, the US military again expanded the size of the ALP to thirty thousand men and extended its mandate for five more years, mainly because NATO considered the ALP a cost-effective solution to local security. At the same time, NATO which provides the bulk of financial and military resources to the ANSF proposed to downsize (by more than one hundred thousand) the more expensive national army and police force (Cloud and Bengali 2013; Hodge 2013). The growth of the insurgency, the perceived failures of top-down statebuilding, the influence of counterinsurgency doctrine, which emphasised local, bottom-up and Afghan-led solutions to the problem of governance and security, and the perceived cost-effectiveness of local defence groups are some of the main rationales which help explain the proliferation of experiments in militia formation after 2009.

Increased support by foreign forces to local militias and the use of military and development spending in support of counterinsurgency, which were mainly captured by local powerbrokers weakened the central government's bargaining position and placed it in competition with foreign forces and local strongmen over the control of patronage and the means of coercion. It prompted the government to intervene in an attempt to exert greater control over peripheral economies of violence that emerged as a result of US and NATO support to local strongmen. The control of private security companies and local militias supported by foreign forces emerged as a key statebuilding priority after 2009, as further discussed in chapter 5. There were two defining moments, which are central to the discussion of local militias and the broader layout of this thesis. During the first half of the decade President Karzai attempted to counter the centrifugal tendencies that US support to different mujahedin groups encouraged. He initially chose accommodation over confronting warlord power, which paved the way for powerful warlords to enter the cabinet and local powerbrokers to capture the provincial security organs. Over time, a class of 'privileged insiders' emerged that enjoyed preferential access to key political and economic resources, this 'elite bargain' underpinned a relatively stable political order after 2001. Crucial to this process were efforts that limited the autonomy of local strongmen and increased their political and economic dependency on the dominant

coalition in the centre, thus preventing the rise of new elite groups outside this patronage system.

The US military's support to private security companies and local militias outside government control undermined the prevailing logic of the post-2001 patrimonial order and the delicate balance of power that mediated centre-periphery relations. It led to the creation of more or less autonomous peripheral political economies under the control of local strongmen over which the dominant coalition in the central government had limited control. It increased the political and economic independence of local powerbrokers (which meant reduced dependency of peripheral elite on network leaders in the dominant coalition in the centre) and in so doing also undermined the government's partial success in expanding its control over the means of coercion and patronage after 2001. Such an outcome threatened the stability of the emerging political order and, expectedly, encountered resistance from the dominant coalition of privileged insiders. Contestations over the fate of local militias led the government to 'nationalise' security, which resulted in a twin regulatory framework: the establishment of the ALP and ban on private security companies and their replacement by a government guard force - the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) under the command of the ministry of interior (see chapter 5). As the empirical chapters show, despite this regulatory framework it was not always possible for the central government to control the flows of patronage and the formation of local militias by foreign forces. In the final analysis, the ALP framework produced a partial and contingent form of central government control over local armed groups supported by the US military in insecure Afghan provinces.

Research questions and methodology

This thesis examines the complex political and security dynamics surrounding the ALP programme in three Afghan provinces: Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz. I aim to answer the following four research questions:

- What were the underlying rationales and interests behind arming local militias from mid-2000s onward?

- Who were the main actors and institutions influencing the processes of militia formation and in what ways did they interact with each other?
- What role did the ALP and other militias play in shaping the motivations of and contestations between different actors and interest groups?
- How do findings from this research provide new insights into the role of coercion, brokerage and patronage politics in processes of statebuilding in contested environments?

The first three questions are empirical questions, the first being concerned with rationales, the second with networks of actors, and the third with outcomes. The fourth question relates to the theoretical contribution of this research.

As previously noted, the ALP programme was justified as a culturally appropriate and cost-effective but temporary measure to supplement Afghan and foreign forces' efforts to counter the insurgency and provide security at the local level. ALP was the culmination of a series of attempts over the years to tap into and rejuvenate what were presented as authentic and enduring rural and tribal traditions of self-protection based on the tribal policing concept of *arbaki*.[2] The programme and its previous iterations evolved and

[2] The term *arbaki* acquired negative connotations for many Afghans during the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s. As part of the Policy of National Reconciliation, Dr. Najibullah's government offered money and weapons to mujahedin groups willing to switch sides and fight for the Soviet-backed government. *Arbaki* and *qaumi* (ethnic) militias (notably Abdul Rashid Dostum's Gelamjam militias) gained particular notoriety following the collapse of Dr. Najibullah's regime because of the human rights abuses committed by those forces during the internecine power struggles between the different mujahedin factions in the early 1990s that eventually paved the way for the rise of the Taliban (Giustozzi 2009b). The word *arbaki* re-entered the popular discourse as a derogatory term following its adoption in northern Afghanistan by local armed groups, government officials and US forces post-2001 to describe anti-Taliban and pro-government militias. It is therefore closely associated with abusive pro-government militias and so called 'illegal armed groups' that operate in places such as Baghlan and Kunduz, as well as elsewhere in the country (HRW 2011). In the past, the word *arbaki* generally had fewer of the negative connotations associated with the word 'militia'. The *arbaki* concept is most positively associated with a small, village-based armed force, a form of community police that was historically constituted by a local tribal jirga or council of elders in Pashtun areas in the south and southeast in order to, among other things, enforce the decisions of the jirga, maintain law and order within the community and safeguard community resources such as land, pastures and forests, and in some instances to defend the community against external threats, including armed incursion by rival tribes or the state. Royal governments in the past also relied on *arbaki* militias to ensure security along the country's southern borders with Pakistan. For a sympathetic account of the *arbaki* tribal security system, see (Osman 2008).

changed over time, reflecting and in turn shaping contestations over the control of the means of violence and the flows of patronage.

Using the extended case method (chapter 3), this research focuses on particular episodes of conflict, using them as an entry point to analyse violence, elite bargaining over the control of resources and the means of coercion, and processes of state consolidation and state centralisation in the context of the post-2001 NATO involvement and the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. The study is based on fifteen months' field research and over one hundred and twenty detailed, structured interviews with a range of key informants, including Afghan officials in Kabul, provincial governors and police chiefs, local elders, provincial council members, security forces personnel, serving and former ministers, ISAF and US Special Forces officers, militia commanders, journalists and civil society activists.

As noted earlier, the role and impact of government-backed local defence forces on security and political dynamics at the provincial level as well as in terms of centre-periphery relations is poorly understood in the context of the post-2001 US/NATO involvement and the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. The available literature on the ALP, limited as it is can be broadly divided into three categories. The first category comprises human rights reports that look at abuses perpetrated by local militias against the civilian population (see for example HRW 2011). The second category, including confidential reports commissioned by the US military generally presents a positive picture of foreign forces' involvement with local militias (Jones and Munoz 2010; Jones 2012) - occasionally, some of these reports have presented a more critical assessment of the US-backed local militias in Afghanistan (Cloud and King 2012; Saum-Manning 2012; Felbab-Brown 2012). The third category comprises reports by local research organisations which are generally more critical and offer relatively greater insights into the more contested dynamics of militia programmes (Lefèvre 2010).

Two important arguments testify to the value that this research adds to the existing body of literature and signify the empirical and theoretical contribution of the thesis. First, existing literature on local militias in Afghanistan is highly normative and generalised – it seeks to either prove the success or the failure of ALP. Second, none of this literature is based upon

deep empirically grounded research, based on a historical approach in a specific context and time period. This research is the first historically situated, empirically grounded analysis of the role played by militias in local conflicts and processes of state formation in post-2001 Afghanistan. It builds on newer and older debates in political economy and a range of disciplines in the social sciences about the complex relationship between coercion, resources, and patrimonial politics in processes of state formation and the problems that a historicised political economy approach raises for liberal understandings of violence and the state. Through a consideration of Afghanistan's modern history and a detailed analysis of the roles played by local militias in three provincial settings, this thesis foregrounds the centrality of violence, transnational resource flows and elite politics to the emergence of state structures in Afghanistan. It makes important theoretical and empirical contributions to an expanding body of literature on violence, local militias, policing, and the contentious politics of statebuilding.

I have chosen to situate this research within the broader historical literature on violence, militias, and patronage politics and their role in the varied trajectories of state formation, which is understood as a disorderly and decidedly non-linear process of the development of state institutions, involving violent competition and compromises between contending elite groups over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion and popular legitimacy. As I explain in the next chapter, the liberal perspective that commonly informs contemporary peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions is ahistorical and tends to edit out the constitutive role of coercion and patronage politics in the emergence of political order in post-interventionary states. The historical political economy approaches which informs this thesis provides a corrective to the prevalent liberal discourse which is used to justify counterinsurgency, and peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions more broadly in post-war societies.

II. Chapters outline

The discussion so far has demonstrated that violence, militias, and patrimonial politics have played a central role in shaping the local security dynamics and contestations over power and resources in the post-2001 political order. The theoretical framework of this

study draws attention to the contested nature of statebuilding in post-war societies. **Chapter two** discusses the limitations of liberal assumptions found in the literature on peacebuilding and statebuilding regarding violence and the consolidation of political order in post-conflict states. It argues that liberal peacebuilding is driven by ahistorical and functionalist views of violence and the state. Exogenous statebuilding embody neoliberal ideals of good governance, democracy and free market relations and ostensibly seeks to reconstruct or transform within a relatively short period of time state institutions and state-society relations in post-war societies. The critique of international intervention challenges assumptions of easy fixes to post-conflict reconstruction and draws attention to the contested nature of the political economy of peacebuilding and statebuilding. In contrast to statebuilding, state formation is concerned with historical developments that involved the 'unconscious and contradictory process of conflicts, negotiations and compromises between diverse groups' which in the long term shaped the development of state institutions (Berman and Lonsdale 1992, 5). As an alternative analytical framework, historical political economy approaches highlight the centrality of coercion and men of violence and the material and symbolic competition among contending elite groups in processes of state formation. The political economy perspective that informs this thesis helps to expose the limitations of the liberal position that tends to edit out the role of violence and contestations over power and resources in statebuilding. Finally, the chapter engages with the transnational dimensions of power configurations and resource extraction in late developing and post-interventionary states. Contemporary states are best understood in relation to transnational processes in order to account for the contested nature of sovereignty and political authority.

In **chapter three**, I explain the methodological framework that will guide the research process. I first examine the shifting post-2001 political and security dynamics and their impact on my research topic and the context in which the research was carried out. By foregrounding the history of deepening international intervention and escalating conflict in the last decade or so the chapter seeks to demonstrate how the underlying structural conditions of a specific context defined by widespread violence, insecurity and an increasing sense of uncertainty and growing distrust shaped the methodological framework of the study and the ways in which contextual factors determined the research

process from elaborating the research questions to data collection to analysis of events and finally the structure of the empirical arguments. Considering the instability of the setting in which this research took place the extended case methodology offered the flexibility needed to conduct research on a sensitive subject like local militias in the midst of an ongoing insurgency. The extended case method uses an event that involves conflict or contestation from which to 'extend out' and build analysis of the broader social and political forces that are actualised in a particular context and historical moment. Since the method focuses on everyday social relations it's inherently processual, it rejects the concept of a fixed social structure or the existence of an inner meaning and instead considers social practice or discourse and 'emergent phenomenon' as central to analysis. There are many ethical and security challenges associated with conducting research on armed groups in conflict zones. The chapter highlights these dilemmas and discusses specific steps to address them during the research process.

Chapter four explores the historical and sociological context of the shifting governance discourses and the conflictual and non-linear development of state power in Afghanistan. Changes in the regional and domestic patterns of political and economic reproduction and the notion of political legitimacy in different historical contexts and during different time periods are crucial in contextualising the start-again-stop-again process of state formation in Afghanistan. It is noted that contestations over political authority among contending elite groups are not reducible to an enduring tug-of-war between for example centralising rulers, the religious establishment and rural tribal power as claimed in some of the literature on Afghanistan. The terms of these contestations as well as the nature of the political actors involved and the different idioms of legitimacy called upon varied considerably over time and space. The chapter examines a number of historical junctures beginning with the emergence of the Durrani conquest empire, the political crises into which the Afghan polity was plunged following the rise of the British imperial power in India and changes in the regional economic patterns, and the significance of the colonial encounter and Afghanistan's buffer status for the consolidation of state power. The consideration of the wider imperial landscape is significant in relation to changes in the political economy and flows of external patronage, the state's institutional framework and the structure of elite privileges after World War II. The outbreak of armed conflict after

1978 is of particular significance because of the emergence of modern political and military organisations and the domination of the countryside by men of violence – mujahedin commanders, militant mullahs and militia leaders whose rise to power during the war years signified the declining influence of the old elites. The war years saw a growing decentralisation of the means of violence, the regionalisation of politico-military networks and the emergence of a regionalised war economy.

Chapter five provides an account of the political and security dynamics in post-2001 Afghanistan. The discussion of political (dis)order and statebuilding after 2001 is organised around three different time periods, beginning with the military and political fragmentation during the early years of the intervention, the result of US military support to a motley collection of Northern Alliance factions that topped the Taliban regime in 2001. In the next decade there was an uneven process of reassembling and consolidating governmental power under the Bonn political framework. The elite bargain paved the way for warlords to dominate the cabinet and commander-networks to incorporate their militias in the provincial security apparatus and administration after 2001. The growing strength of the insurgency and rising insecurity after 2008 led the US military to experiment with militia formation in an attempt to contain the insurgency. Arming local commanders outside government control represented a reversal of the partial success that had been achieved in strengthening the government's hold over the means of coercion through controversial bargains with warlords and commander-networks and symbolised a return to the political and military fragmentation of the early years of the intervention. It threatened the stability of the elite bargain and the privileges of the dominant coalition in power. This led the central government to take steps in order to regulate the flow of direct US military patronage to local commanders. The ALP thus emerged as a compromise solution that on the one hand paved the way for the Afghan government to 'nationalise' militias and on the other, led to the expansion of US-backed militia formation under Afghan government oversight. As the empirical chapters show the ALP represented a partial regime of control over local armed groups and ultimately produced a precarious outcome.

These four chapters set the stage for the empirical chapters of the thesis. The three empirical chapters together present a critical analysis of the US military's engagement

with local militias. Baghlan and Kunduz, like Wardak before them became important in relation to the insurgency after 2009 and became additional sites of experimentation in militia formation, leading to very different outcomes. The chapters seek to demonstrate the heterogeneity and complexity of the provincial security architecture and shows how the ALP programme was mediated and translated through complex bargaining relationships between international actors, national elites and provincial powerbrokers in the context of an intensifying insurgency. These were essentially political processes unevenly shaped by the security environment and the economic interests of diverse actors in each context over different time periods. The same programme looked very different in one context compared to another.

In **chapter six**, I examine the emergence and evolution of the AP3 and its transition to the ALP in Wardak province. By retracing the AP3 processes, the chapter exposes the limits and contradictions of the 'cultural turn' that became increasingly prevalent in US military circles as the war against insurgents showed few signs of victory and NATO expanded its counterinsurgency mission, leading to ever-greater involvement by foreign forces in local governance and local security issues. Cultural engagement and the invoking of tribal traditions of self-protection or arbaki were meant to create a 'tribal' backlash against the Taliban. However, in practice it proved rather difficult to revive 'traditions' of self-protection that were mainly based upon an idealized and reified vision of the past. The chapter highlights the difficulties that the US military encountered in Wardak as local support for forming militias in a province beset with rival armed groups proved elusive. The final legacy of US military engagement with local militias was a deeply troubling one – in late 2012 and early 2013 US Special Forces and Afghan militias associated with them were accused of a series of murders and torture of prisoners. The controversy generated by the case was eventually resolved when the Afghan government forced NATO to withdraw that particular Special Forces team from Wardak.

Chapter seven retraces the emergence of arbaki and ALP militias in Baghlan province. The chapter examines the contestation over power and resources among rival armed groups, the Jamiat-affiliated Andarabi commanders and Pashtun commanders linked to Hizb in Pul-e-Khumri. I provide the account of an armed clash between Pashtun members

of the ALP force and the provincial police dominated by Andarabi commanders in order to highlight the complex dynamics of the power struggle in Baghlan after 2001. The incident shows how local power struggles play a crucial role in structuring contemporary centre-periphery relations. The Pashtun powerbrokers' concerns over the loss of power and resources after 2001 provided the impetus to form local militias, beginning in Pul-e-Khumri. The fragility of the political settlement, partial control of territory, the contested view of local security and distrust of government forces and increase in NATO and Taliban military activities turned Baghlan into an important setting for the formation of local militias. In contrast to Wardak, American troops and counterinsurgency doctrine initially did not play a role in the establishment of local militia in Baghlan - they emerged as part of the local dynamics of violence and security architecture. The ALP was mainly used by local powerbrokers as a tool for defence against Taliban attacks or protection against predation by government forces. It became a vehicle for marginalised Pashtun powerbrokers to renegotiate the terms of the post-2001 political settlement dominated by Jamiat commanders, although such efforts in the end produced ambiguous results.

Chapter eight offers a window into the complexity of political and security dynamics in Kunduz, a former Taliban stronghold. In this chapter, I retrace the emergence of arbaki militias and their transition to the ALP. The expansion of the insurgency in 2009 threatened the power of the dominant coalition led by Jamiat commanders. The counter-response to the insurgency was initially a local initiative with little involvement from the central government or US forces. The growing insurgency created space for jihadi commanders to re-assert their authority; local strongmen like Mir Alam played a crucial role in forming arbaki militias in Kunduz. He relied upon commander-networks under his control to recruit hundreds of Jamiat fighters and successfully pushed back the Taliban from many areas of Kunduz – and in the process re-emerged as the provincial strongman. In contrast to Baghlan where the Pashtun-dominated ALP attempted to renegotiate Jamiat's dominance of the provincial power structures, the arbaki and ALP militias in Kunduz were mainly dominated by a Jamiat-led coalition of Tajik and Uzbek commanders and it represented the attempts of the ruling coalition to preserve the status quo ante. However, the partial victory over the Taliban led to turf wars among the different armed groups and the abusive treatment of civilians. Anxieties over the conduct

of predatory militias led to uneven government efforts in 2011 and 2012 to disarm local militias in Khanabad district. The final outcome was less than ideal; local commanders retained their weapons on the grounds that they needed to protect their areas against Taliban insurgents. The chapter shows that local militias in Khanabad were not rebelling against the state – by resisting the state's demands to disarm they were bargaining with the government in an attempt to secure patronage and play a role in the provision of local security.

Finally, **chapter nine** highlights the main findings of the research and concludes the discussion by outlining the key contributions of the research to emerging theory and practice.

Chapter 2: Coercion, patrimonial practices and the institutionalisation of power

I. Introduction

This chapter engages with theoretical debates on violence, state formation and statebuilding. It explores the intertwined relationship between coercion, resources and patronage politics in processes of state formation and state consolidation. It aims to show the need for historicising contestations over power among contending elite groups and the evolving governance relations in contemporary Afghanistan (chapters 4 and 5). Much of the academic literature on post-2001 Afghanistan is shaped by a policy driven peacebuilding and statebuilding discourse. The US military intervention that toppled the Taliban regime was in response to the events of 11 September 2001 and set the stage for this global enterprise, with its firm belief in political and economic liberalisation and statebuilding as a recipe for post-conflict peace to unfold. However, it should be noted that the immediate justification for the military intervention and the subsequent peacebuilding efforts derived not so much from a desire to bring good governance to Afghans than dealing with the danger of international terrorism which found a 'safe haven' under Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Thus, the war on terror involved military partnerships with Afghan warlords and commanders who fought alongside US Special Forces in unseating the Taliban from power. Subsequently, they dominated the political and economic landscape and continued to serve as military assets for US and NATO forces in the fight against a resurgent Taliban.

This broader structuring environment is important to consider in relation to the liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding discourse and the empirical reality of consolidating power in post-2001 Afghanistan. To facilitate a focused discussion of the ensuing debates it is important to distinguish between liberal statebuilding and the historical processes of state formation. Statebuilding is defined as a conscious attempt at 'creating an apparatus of control' (Berman and Lonsdale 1992, 5; Bliesemann de Guevara 2010, 113). Thus 'exogenous statebuilding' embodied neoliberal ideals meant to reconstruct or transform within a relatively short period of time state institutions and state-society relations in

post-conflict countries (Suhrke 2011a; Mayall and de Oliviera 2011). Statebuilding emerged in part as a response to the perceived problem of fragile or failed states. These were understood to be 'ungoverned spaces' and potential safe havens for terrorists and insurgents producing chaos and disorder that needed to be contained and rectified through the restoration of key governmental functions including the delivery of security and welfare. External intervention then sought to impose ostensibly liberal frameworks of good governance, democracy and free market relations in an attempt to actively contribute to the construction of liberal polities, economies and societies (Chesterman 2004b; Paris 2004; Richmond 2008a).

In contrast to statebuilding, state formation is concerned with historical developments that involved the 'unconscious and contradictory process of conflicts, negotiations and compromises between diverse groups' which in the long term shaped the development of state institutions (Berman and Lonsdale 1992, 5). The political economy perspectives which are drawn upon in this thesis, highlight the centrality of coercion and men of violence in historical processes of state formation (Elias 1982; Tilly 1985; Tilly 1992; Olson 1993; Barkey 1994). Tilly understood state formation as a 'contested, disorderly and often violent process' (Meagher 2012, 1076). From this perspective coercion-intensive forms of centralising power more closely resemble historical experience than the liberal version of 'nice statebuilding' (Mayall and de Oliviera 2011). Yet, Leander (2004) has rightly cautioned against an over-reliance on Tilly's argument that wars make states – the early experiences of state formation in Europe should not be unthinkingly applied to warfare and state contestation in the contemporary world (cited Meagher 2012, 1078).

As explored in this chapter, brokerage politics and patrimonial networks and practices historically developed side by side with modern bureaucratic institutions. Historicised accounts of state formation show that what appeared to be local or customary forms of authority, that supposedly sought to keep the state at bay were often in fact shaped or sustained by state power (chapters 4 & 5). For example, colonial powers routinely reinvented tribal traditions of authority to empower local clients whom they designated as

'traditional' and used them as bulwark against nationalist movements in the colonies (Mamdani 1996; Mamdani 2012).[3] In the globalised world of today the state's 'single sovereign'[4] framework is contested not only from below (e.g. tribes) or by global forces from above (e.g. markets) but increasingly by transnational regimes of power which often work through rather than by completely side-lining domestic states (Sassen 2008). Post-conflict spaces can be understood as fields of power where sovereignty is contested and negotiated between global, national and local elites, which may produce partial or horizontal sovereignties (J. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Bertelsen 2009). At the same time such novel political realities have provided new opportunities for domestic elites to access global resources and build relatively stable patrimonial orders (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008; Heathershaw 2013).

Contemporary modes of power challenge the basic understanding of the state based on Weber's ideal type conception as a bounded, singular and coherent national spatial entity (Migdal and Schlichte 2005). Foucault showed that modern states rarely possessed complete autonomy, dominance, coherence, and rationality (Foucault 1991). In contexts where political authority was historically fragmented, state institutions routinely shared sovereign prerogatives with local power holders (Mamdani 1996). States are also shaped and constrained by wider political and economic forces beyond their borders. As Sassen's work shows, contemporary states cannot be reduced to a singular logic or rationality and may better be conceptualised as transnational assemblages of local-and-global (Sassen 2008). This unsettles the binary between the national and the global as two separate, bounded entities (Moore 2005). Instead it considers contemporary states in relation to, and enmeshed in global processes.

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[3] The invention of native traditions served as a precondition of indirect rule. British colonial authorities, for example, routinely established the credentials of their native allies as 'traditional' and 'authentic'. Natives were said to be tribal by nature; the practice of governing them was called native administration (Mamdani 2012). These native allies of the colonial regime represented the continuity of tradition, while nationalists and pro-independence movements were often portrayed as radicals and threat to both colonial rule and native traditions.

[4] Heathershaw and Lambach argue that post-conflict peacebuilding routinely adopt a 'single sovereign' perspective which 'assumes the individuality of the state and fails to capture how international strategies are subverted, appropriated and resisted 'on the ground'' (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008, 276).

I have drawn upon historicised political economy approaches in this thesis in order to foreground the centrality of violence, transnational resource flows, elite bargaining, and patrimonial politics and the inter-relationship between these different elements in the context of state formation. This chapter, therefore, explores the historical relationship between violence and the emergence of state power. I situated this research within the broader literature on state formation as it provides a useful corrective to the prevalent liberal discourse, which is used by Western powers to justify peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions in post-war societies. The liberal perspective, as explained further below, is ahistorical and tends to overlook the role of coercion in statebuilding.

The first section of this chapter attempts to historicise violence by placing it within everyday social relations. It then turns to the role of coercion and military leaders in state formation processes. Next, I explore forms of political authority based on brokerage and patronage that emerged in particular historical contexts. The liberal perspective's challenge to the positive contribution of violence is followed by renewed appreciation of the contested dynamics of political rule. A critical understanding of the liberal state enables the debate to move beyond the confines of existing theories and disingenuous celebration of 'the local' and hybridity as a basis for analysing the post-2001 emergence of a more or less centralised patrimonial order, which partially replaced the political fragmentation of the early years of intervention. In the final section, I draw upon anthropological and post-colonial perspectives to demonstrate the contingent and dispersed nature of modern power exemplified by transnational processes and multiple sovereignties.

II. Historicising violence

The starting point for our inquiry is that violence, understood as social practice, is a constitutive element of the formation and transformation of modern society and the state. However, the ontological dualism that conceives society and state power in terms of binary divisions and opposites tends to assign violence to the domain of individual greed and predation (of warlords and militia commanders for example) and legitimate authority (and use of force) in the framework of the state (Coronil and Skurski 2006). It is

important to emphasise that any large scale organisation of violence requires the fulfilment of three basic tasks: the activation of social boundaries of difference (us verus them, the oriental 'other', civilised and barbarian), recruiting fighters or entrepreneurs of violence and the mobilisation of economic resources (Tilly 2003b; Bakonyi and Bliesemann De Guevara 2009; Barkawi and Stanski 2013). The forms that violence takes (long lasting wars, intermittent violent conflicts or sporadic riots) and the time frame over which it takes place depends on the degree to which actors are able to provide these three organisational prerequisites. Collective violence declines when these 'symbolic, economic and organisational resources' are exhausted (Bakonyi and Bliesemann De Guevara 2009). This may lead to a hurting stalemate and peace negotiations or to one side winning and imposing a post-war order on the vanquished. Post-war orders do not necessarily mean the end of violence, which can mutate into high levels of criminal and social violence – Bourgois has drawn attention to structural, symbolic and everyday violence in post-war conditions (Bourgois 2001). Sometimes violent conflicts last a long time and transition into times of 'peace' when the political and military position attained during war becomes the foundation for a highly unequal postwar related economic development sustained by neoliberal liberalisation and privatisation policies (Cramer 2006b).

The recognition of war and violent conflict as a historical process resulted in a shift of focus in political economy literature on civil wars from causality (Collier and Hoeffler 2004) to social and political transformations taking place during violent conflict (Keen 1998; Cramer 2006a). This understanding attributed certain logics to post-Cold War armed conflicts, questioning the notion that war is wholly destructive and amount to development in reverse. This historical perspective on violent conflict left open the possibility that some wars could, in spite of the obvious costs, lead to progressive and long-term transformative outcomes. Contributors to this debate argued that violent conflict must be investigated empirically, as opposed to placing it at the margin of modernity (and the state) and beyond everyday social relations (Bakonyi and Bliesemann De Guevara 2009). Once the binary between violence and the ordinary, and order and disorder is unsettled (J. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006) it became possible to see violent practices as an integral and constitutive part of everyday political relations and societal

institutions, rather than in opposition to political order and social progress (Coronil and Skurski 2006, 3). Such perspectives on violence therefore problematise the abstraction of the modern, liberal state as an agent of order which stands as an autonomous and neutral actor above the passions and conflicts of society (Mann 1984). Previous sedimentations of violence and historical memory shaped by power relations play an important role in the articulation of violent practices (Moore 2005, 3). The 'contextualisation of violent practices and settings' is crucial in developing a nuanced understanding of the embedded role of violence in everday social relations as well as 'in broader historical times' (Bakonyi and Bliesemann De Guevara 2009, 398). As I demonstrate in the empirical chapters, contextualising violence requires 'thick descriptions' and thinking beyond the violent episode or event itself (i.e. extending out) and focusing on broader social relations (of power) and the history of contestations between contending groups.

However, the liberal position is that widespread violence is indicative of a state's failure to monopolise the means and use of violence and provide security, a sign of a weak or fragile state. The association of destructive aspects with collective violence has 'contributed to the general assumption that violence belongs mainly in the realm of failure, lack of order and chaos', as pathological deviance from the Western ideal of liberal peace (ibid 2009). By contrast, historical political economy literature shows that violent practices and military leaders have been at the heart of state formation processes, which eventually culminated in the rise of the modern European state order. Today, violent entrepreneurs and warlords-strongmen have regained some respectability in the post-colonial world because of their role as 'rebel rulers' (Mampilly 2011) or 'strongman-governors' (Mukhopadhyay 2014).

III. The violent men of the past: state formation and wielders of coercion

This section starts by examining organised violence and the political effects that result from contestations over large-scale violence in relation to the centralisation of power and the emergence of political authority. It draws upon Tilly's trinity of coercion, capital and legitimacy and the inter-relation between these three commodities in the context of state formation. States emerged as a result of their capacity to carry out four principal

activities: war making (fighting and eliminating rival rulers abroad and expanding territory), state making (internal pacification and eradicating domestic rivals of a central ruler), protection (eliminating internal enemies of the ruler's clients) and extraction (accumulating the coercive and financial means), which was needed to carry out the first three activities – war making, state making, and protection (Tilly 1985, 181). Yet, all four activities depended 'on the state's tendency to monopolise the concentrated means of coercion' in centralised military organisations (ibid 1985). These were all related to the state's coercive capacity; to both externally directed large-scale violence to defeat rival rulers and expand territory and internally directed small-scale violence in the form of policing to pacify or eradicate domestic rivals of a ruler (Tilly 1985, 1992). This relates to the differentiation between policing and military – they involve different kinds of violence, coercive power, actors and organisations, though in practice they frequently become merged. Michael Mann distinguishes between states which rule through despotic or raw coercive power and those which govern through infrastructural power associated with policing and governance (Mann 1984).

Tilly's historical political economy analysis showed how European rulers gradually and inadvertently succeeded in accumulating and concentrating the means of coercion leading to the emergence of the modern national-state. In his analysis war making was central to the consolidation of state power. However, it is important to recognize that in many respects state formation in early modern Europe was a precarious process - there were great variations in the forms of states that eventually emerged. Unsuccessful polities were swallowed up by successful ones as evident from the greater number of polities in the sixteenth century compared to those at the beginning of the twentieth - eventually the national-state emerged as the dominant form of political power in Europe. Likewise, Elias studied the historical processes that led to centralisation and bureaucratisation of power over time, and the varied outcomes that emerged in different contexts (Elias 1982; Elias 1983). His analysis focused on the broader socio-economic processes that helped explain the institutionalisation and centralisation of power.[5]

[5] They included war making, urbanisation, commercialisation, industrialisation, monopoly formation and bureaucratisation of power.

The relationship between coercion and protection

In the chaotic world of early modern Europe, rulers and their domains were constantly challenged by internal and external threats. The archetypical figure of the European ruler as feudal lord and military leader providing protection against external threats is pervasive in the state formation literature of that period. To confront these threats, rulers had to resort to war making to defeat other rulers and to crush internal rivals and consolidate power. The need to raise the necessary resources for war making prompted rulers to concentrate the means of coercion by building standing armies, extracting resources, promoting wealth creation and establishing bureaucratic administrations. The self-serving impulse to protect their own domain led early European rulers to engage in these other activities. But why did wars occur? Tilly says because 'coercion works' (Tilly 1992, 70). Rulers used their coercive advantage to expand their control over populations and resources; when they encountered no opposition, they conquered and took territory. When they faced opposition they made war; and when they managed to establish routine control over larger territories and populations they became rulers of states: 'Europeans farmed, manufactured, traded and, especially fought each other. Almost inadvertently, they thereby created national states' (ibid 1992, 14–16).

Tilly offered an analogy between states and organised crime to illustrate the link between coercion and protection. He argued that governments have long been in the 'business' of providing (and withholding) protection. The provision of protection by a government against internal and external violence in exchange for rents (taxes) is not only a defining characteristic of the state, it also, paradoxically, qualifies as racketeering and as such constitute the 'largest example of organised crime' (ibid 1985, 169–171). The difference is that ordinary racketeering operates without government sanction, while government protection is considered legitimate. The distinction between 'legitimate' violence of the state and 'illegitimate' violence used by criminal groups is based on the 'advantage of legitimacy' conferred on the state as a result of its monopolisation of violence: 'governments stand out from other organisations by their tendency to monopolize the concentrated means of violence' (ibid 1985, 171). Since governments are in the business of selling protection, the very activity of producing and controlling violence tended toward monopoly because competition raised the costs of production.

The monopoly of violence and the centralisation of power in early modern Europe emerged, inadvertently, as a result of a broader 'civilizing process' (Elias 1982; Elias 1983) and centuries of state making involving gradual but decisive changes in the social, military and economic functions in society. In other words, state making did not follow some grand, conscious plan to build centralised institutions. Violent power struggles over territory (when land constituted the main means of reproduction before mercantile capitalism) among rival rulers whose claim to legitimacy as military leaders was primarily established by conquest and the ability to provide protection against external and internal threats intensified the drive for extracting the means of coercion, accumulation of capital and more effective ways of war making. These complementary activities gradually led to the creation of standing armies and civilian bureaucracies to administer war making abroad and state making at home.

Centralising the means of violence proved decisive and when carried out effectively reinforced other state capacities. For example, when a state succeeded in eradicating its internal rivals it strengthened its ability to extract resources from the domestic economy, enabling the ruler to wage war and to protect his followers. Each particular use of violence also produced specific forms of organisation. War making yielded centralised standing armies and supporting services. State making produced instruments of internal surveillance and control, notably policing and intelligence capacities. The creation of armies and policing functions enabled rulers to provide protection to their allies and dependants. Attempts by rulers to extract capital in turn necessitated the development of a judicial system by way of which the protected, traders and merchants and other followers, accessed the protection that was their due. Representation in the form of assemblies and parliaments also emerged as a result of this bargain between rulers and the ruled. Fiscal and accounting structures emerged to enable extraction from productive classes in society. In short, each particular mode of the organisation and deployment of violence 'accounts for much of the characteristic structure of European states' (ibid 1985).

Militias, middlemen and the taming of coercion

Early in the state making process control over the means of violence was fragmented and many groups shared the right to use violence. They ranged from mercenaries to pirates and bandits to kings and princely rulers via feudal lords and regional power holders, tax collectors and professional soldiers (Tilly 1985, 173–75). In such a fragmented world predation, banditry and racketeering were conjoined at the hip with 'legitimate' rulers and government officials. Therefore, before European rulers acquired permanent standing armies they had to rely on indirect rule and the services of feudal lords, local magnets, bandits and pirates to wage war and conquer territory (Tilly 1985, 174; Tilly 2003a, 50). The 'long love-hate affair between aspiring state makers and pirates or bandits' illustrate that a symbiotic relationship between 'predation, coercion, piracy, banditry, and racketeering' and 'their upright cousins in responsible government' was common during this period (ibid 1985, 175). In other words, behind piracy and banditry stood states and local strongmen. In times of war states hired bandits to cut the cost of paying regular soldiers (they provided for themselves by preying on the civilian population) and used them to raid their enemies. Such a strategy obviously caused additional long-term problems. As Tilly reminded 'when demobilized, they commonly continued the same practices, but without the same royal protection; demobilized ships became pirate vessels, demobilized troops bandits' (ibid 1985, 173). Rulers in Ottoman Turkey similarly relied on bandits and regular soldiers for waging wars and policing vast territories, but during peacetime the demobilised soldiers who had turned into banditry had to be co-opted to maintain peace and exert state control in remote parts of the empire. As Barkey noted no matter how strong an empire was, it had to deal with peripheral power holders and local elites to maintain control, extract resources, forge military cooperation and ensure political stability (Barkey 2008, 9–10). The local bandits that Barkey wrote about were not necessarily interested in revolting against the Ottoman state, they were actually using banditry to attract the attention of central rulers and get co-opted and secure regular state patronage, which in turn resulted in expansion of central control. In chapter 8, I describe a similar dynamic of revolt and co-optation in Kunduz involving local militias and their attempts to extract concessions from the central government.

Local militias like bandits and pirates in the examples above are shaped and sometimes even created by states. The relationship between armed actors and the state is indeed a complex one and must not be reduced to mere predation or state breakdown (Klare 2004; Bates 2008; Rotberg 2004). Militias and warlords do not always emerge as a result of state weakness or failure. Neither do they automatically cause state weakness by their presence (Jones 2012; Marten 2012). States have time and again relied on local militias to exert control in peripheral parts of their domain. Any challenge to or partial control of the monopoly of force by the state does not mean a return to the Hobbesian state of nature. Historically, most states acted as brokers seeking to extend their control through franchising the means of coercion rather than monopolising them (Barkey 1994; Ahram 2011b). For several hundred years rulers in Europe relied on indirect rule and governed vast territories through intermediaries and local clients. These local rulers served their function as agents, brokers and middlemen linking central rulers and the local population under their control (Tilly 2003a; Mukhopadhyay 2014). Imperial and colonial powers routinely empowered and then relied upon local chiefs and tribal leaders to strengthen their rule. The British, for example, created tribal jirgas and established local militias to help them police frontier territories along the border with Afghanistan during the nineteenth century (Marsden and Hopkins 2011; Beattie 2013).

The decentralisation of coercion and reliance on indirect rule gradually gave way as sovereigns centralised power and established standing armies and developed institutions capable of policing and surveillance. As already noted, state formation involved the creation of military organisations that specialised in the monopoly of large-scale violence (Mann 1993; Tilly 1992). It involved the management of the 'art of coercion' (Giustozzi 2011). Policing in support of the state's surveillance and compliance functions tended to occur in parallel to and distinct from war making forces. It involved the management of small-scale violence and went hand in hand with the gradual disarmament of the population (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013, 3). This relates to Mann's differentiation between despotic and infrastructural violence – as states expanded they were increasingly able to penetrate society and relied more on infrastructural power associated with policing and softer technologies of governance such as mapping and surveillance rather than raw despotic power (Mann 1984). Such tactics of government are at the core of

attempts to institutionalise and legitimise physical coercion and political power. Weber offered a key insight in relation to the legitimisation of power in terms of the success of state's bureaucracies in transforming 'coercion or power *(Macht)* into domination *(Herrschaft)* – a type of authority that is based on obedience and recognition rather than sheer physical force' (Weber cited in Hagmann and Péclard 2010, 543). Giustozzi refers to this process as the 'taming' of violence – that is 'the growing sophistication of coercion' which is central to statebuilding (Giustozzi 2011, 6).

Capital accumulation and monopoly formation

The most important changes at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period which solidified the movement toward greater centralisation and bureaucratisation of power in Europe related to the rising economic significance of trade over fixed assets like land (Elias 1983, 22). This represented the early gradual shift from feudalism to capitalism - the new economic opportunities placed the bourgeoisie at an advantage over feudal lords who received fixed incomes from their estates and gradually grew impoverished as land lost its economic value. The gradual expansion of the money sector and the associated monetisation of the economy resulted in increased flow of taxation revenues to the treasuries of central rulers; the taxation apparatus gave the central ruler a greater share of the increasing wealth. The growing financial strength of the central ruler also enhanced his military potential. The 'man who had at his disposal the taxes of an entire country was in a position to hire more warriors than any other; by the same token he grew less dependent on the war services which the feudal vassal was obliged to render in exchange for the land with which he was invested' (Elias 1982, 2:8–9). This process gradually led to the formation of central institutions like the military, which ended the monopoly of feudal lords over the means of violence and dispersed it widely among paid soldiers and officers of a standing army. The marginalisation of feudal lords and a warrior class of nobles from the profitable economic sector and military service strengthened the power of central rulers and gradually led to greater centralisation of power. Military supremacy, therefore, went hand in hand with financial superiority, enabling 'the central power of a region to take on "absolute" character' (ibid

1982, 2:10). The relationship between coercion and capital is a circular one: the regular flow of financial resources into central treasury maintained its monopoly on military force (rulers could afford to establish large standing armies), which in turned maintained the monopoly on taxation: 'they are the two sides of the same monopoly. If one disappears the other automatically follows' (Elias 1982, 2:104).

The increase in the power of the central authority was therefore 'the precondition for the pacification of a given territory… from a single centre' (ibid). This is how central rulers emerged as absolute sovereigns rather than on the basis of a social contract between free men and an appointed absolute monarch (Hobbes 1996). Central rulers also gained power by manipulating divisions among social classes. As explained above, the nobility lost power to the bourgeois classes with the increase in the money sector of the economy. This unintended social mechanism led to the eruption of tensions between the two groups. The rise and power of the central institutions always depended on the continued existence of this tension between the nobility and the bourgeoisie. It was in the interest of the ruler to ensure that neither group gained the upper hand and that some form of equilibrium was maintained. Any alliances between the aristocratic and bourgeoisie groups threatened the supremacy of the central power and a ruler had to constantly guard against that. The central ruler regularly manipulated the allocation of resources to decide the balance of power in his favour by playing off different ranks of nobility against each other and his bourgeois advisors and ministers (Elias 1983, 269–70).

It is important to explain the socio-economic processes that favoured centralisation in the early modern period but strengthened forces opposing centralisation in an earlier age. The basic function of an early European ruler was that of the military leader to be victorious in battle and defend the realm against external aggression. Internally, he provided protection and distributed land (his own and newly conquered) to followers who had joined him in battle and afterwards served him as local officials to administer the realm. That was the foundation of his royal power (Elias 1982, 2:15). With each conquest the ruler's domain expanded. He appointed local officials to administer the newly conquered territories. Each official was given some land to sustain his position. The central ruler's land holdings progressively dwindled as a result of redistribution to local clients. Without the ability to conquer and redistribute new lands and maintain followers, central rulers

gradually lost their power. As ‘fewer vassals followed the king, the less threatening his power became and so the few vassals followed him’, a dynamic that cumulatively reduced the power of central rulers and strengthened centrifugal forces (ibid 1982, 2:22). To maintain his position as army leader and distributor of economic means, a central ruler had to be constantly on the path to war: acquiring new means of production and redistributing them to maintain his power and when they proved insufficient he again had to embark on war making.

As long as local officials-turned-local rulers were not threatened by an external invading force they no longer depended on the central ruler to sustain and protect themselves. In times of peace this led to appointed local officials taking over the land entrusted to them and turning it to hereditary property of their family. Even when possible for a ruler to displace such officials by appointing new ones, within a short time the same process happened again: new rulers took over the land, made their position hereditary and demonstrated their independence from the central authority. The state of military and economic development at the time made it inevitable for rulers to rely on this mode of social reproduction. In a barter economy rulers had no access to money to pay their armies and local officials. To pay or reward their dependants rulers could only allocate land. It was only when local rulers faced a military threat from outside the domain, when they needed the king as military leader that the power shifted back to the central ruler and the game started all over again. The conqueror-king reunited the whole territory and through ‘external victory… lay the foundation of a strengthened internal central power’ (ibid 1982, 2:19–20). He then distributed the land anew, taking land from some and distributing it to others and the cycle repeated itself as long as the barter economy remained unchanged. The main role of the central ruler therefore consisted of army leader, conqueror and distributor of new lands. The various elements in this dilemma include ‘the necessity of providing warriors and officials with land, the unavoidable diminution of the royal possessions unless new campaigns of conquest took place, the tendency of the central authority to weaken in times of peace – all these are part of the great process of “feudalisation”’, which demonstrates ‘how indissolubly this specific form of rule and its apparatus of government were bound to a particular economic structure’ (Elias 1982, 2:26).

As long as the barter economy predominated in society the formation of a centralised bureaucracy was scarcely possible. This is a recurring theme in early state making in which centripetal force catalysed forms of centrifugal action and resistance which resulted in a constant oscillation of power, helping to explain the 'start again, stop again' dynamics of state formation – it is not a smooth linear process (Cramer and Goodhand 2002, 898).[6] Only with the growth of the money sector and when economic interdependence increased relatively stable central institutions emerged. It took a long time for European rulers to centralise power, most of it inadvertently. Gradually a system of absolute monarchical rule emerged based on extensive interdependencies between local power holders and the central ruler and his court, which became the centre of national power in early modern Europe. Elias placed what he termed 'highly centralized patrimonial bureaucracies' somewhere between patrimonialism and sultanism.[7] It refers to a type of ruler who asserts himself against established existing groups with the help of other groups that were previously outsiders. This form of absolute rule relates to a monopoly rule that has become firmly established (Elias 1983, 21–22). The rise of a highly centralised patrimonial form of rule, which in France of this period took the form of a 'court society' was undoubtedly connected to the growing centralisation of state power and the monopolisation of the two decisive sources of power of any centralising ruler: the revenues derived from the domestic economy in the form of taxes and tributes and large-scale coercion in the form of military and police power (Elias 1983, 2). The expansion of trade and mercantile capitalism created taxable revenues for central rulers, in contrast to land revenues which reproduced the dynamics of 'feudalisation' – since the ruler awarded land in exchange for the services of followers who over time increasingly became independent, and as the ruler's land possessions diminished he became one among many territorial rulers of roughly equal strength.

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[6] The process of conquest, feudalisation and centralisation is also central to state formation in Afghanistan. The Afghan kings' 'power rested on their ability to distribute wealth to followers' which they obtained from the conquest of India (Hopkins 2008, 30). As long Afghan rulers retained this option they managed to sustain this patronage system. However, when the opportunity of conquest and plunder ended with the arrival of the British in India the empire gradually shrunk in size as centrifugal forces gained power.

[7] Max Weber defined patrimonialism as a traditional form of domination in which all power and sovereignty resided in the king or prince (Weber 1954).

Money on the other hand changed this form of exchange and in fact had the opposite effect in terms of centralisation of power. Regular taxes strengthened the power of central rulers and since they had access to more money than any other local ruler who depended on fixed income from the land, they gradually incorporated and co-opted local power holders, expanded their central courts and the size of dependants and pacified their courtly followers and dependants, even nobles were treated like servants (Elias 1982, 2:8–9; Elias 1983, 269). This represented the dawn of an age of absolutism or centralised rule. The emergence of absolutism as a form of rule was part of a longer-term 'civilizing process' 'linked to the formation of the hierarchical social order with the absolute ruler and, more broadly, his court at its head' (Elias 1982, 2:4). The court of Louis XIV, therefore, represented the most mature example of a patrimonial form of political rule and the institutionalisation of power (Elias 1983). In between, depending on the situation, centralising rulers relied on a mixed strategy of 'eliminating, subjugating, dividing, conquering, cajoling, buying' rivals sources of power, all of which in the long run led to the 'massive pacification' of the population 'and monopolization of the means of coercion' (Tilly 1985, 175). In most accounts rulers had to fight wars, dominate rivals, extract resources, provide protection, expand markets and build alliances with political and economically active groups in their quest to consolidate their rule (Tilly 1992).

Modern states, according to Milliken and Krause perform three core functions: providing security, representation and welfare (Milliken and Krause 2002). They take their cue from Tilly to argue that modern states developed in the cities and battlefields of early modern Europe. The competition forced rulers to strengthen their armies, make wars, accumulate capital and develop industry. The conditions for economic development and redistribution of wealth are related to the development of capitalism – the state emerged as an efficient mechanism for ensuring property rights and securing markets, including overseas that allowed capitalism to flourish. Welfare emerged much later to ensure a degree of wealth redistribution and gain legitimacy. Popular resistance played an important role in rulers agreeing to demands for popular representation (T. Hansen and Stepputat 2001). As already noted, state building in Europe depended on the mobilisation of three kinds of resources: coercion, capital and legitimacy. State institutions developed endogenously and were embedded in the national political economy. However it is also

important to note that processes of state consolidation were inseparable from imperial conquest and expansion. Take the example of Britain, which 'in a violently competitive European state system and in need of external resources, did the most advantageous thing it could: build a fiscal-military state, capable of sponsoring and protecting plantations overseas and factories at home' (Cooper 2014, 13). Therefore, a relatively strong state - militaristically and economically aggressive - rather than the unfettered market was key to Britain's industrial take off (ibid 2014). From this perspective, early European states like today's late developing states happened to draw on transnational resources and fields of power to sustain themselves – the former involved forced extraction, while the latter resulted in aid dependency.

The changed post-colonial context of statebuilding

As it happened, de-colonisation after World War II and the end of the Cold War paved the way for the emergence of new nation-states in former European colonies. Unlike in early Europe where wars (and capitalism) made states, these newly independent states emerged as a result of international recognition of their sovereignty and relied more on international than domestic resources and legitimacy (Jackson 1991). The changed international context, notably during and post-Cold War, ranging from fixed borders to limits on wars of conquest differently affected the statebuilding strategies of postcolonial rulers and late developing states than those in the earlier period. Each period involved shifts in the way states relate to broader global processes and political elites gain access to and mobilise capital, coercion and legitimacy (Clapham 2002; Heathershaw and Lambach 2008). As the post-2001 Afghan case illustrates, the large flow of international resources had a huge bearing on the question of centralisation/decentralisation of power and the statebuilding strategies of Western donors as well as domestic elites – for instance this dynamic has reinforced the rentier aspects of Afghan statebuilding (Suhrke 2011b).

The contemporary organisation and management of the means of violence in the developing world needs to be placed within the wider context of the international system of states and the changes unleashed by globalisation. Power struggles and competition

over the means of coercion and resources among elites in developing countries are primarily internal as opposed to when European state-makers fought against external rivals for territorial gain (in Tilly's sense of war-making abroad which proved crucial to state making at home). The current internationally sanctioned fixed borders regime makes it impossible for a 'plundering polity' like the one established by Afghan Durrani rulers to survive in contemporary times (chapter 4). The easy flow of international money (in aid and military spending) has turned the focus of Afghan rulers from internal plunder (taxation) to external dependency and rentier state dynamics, which has in the long run undermined political legitimacy.

Suhrke's examination of exogenous statebuilding in Afghanistan after 2001 drew on Tilly to show that in the post-9/11 interventionary context domestic rulers increasingly acquire the three principal commodities of capital, coercion and legitimacy, which are central to Tilly's treatment of endogenous state formation in Europe from external sources, the intervening powers rather than through bargaining with domestic elites (Suhrke 2011a).[8] This example shows that post-interventionary states are linked to global networks for accruing arms, capital and legitimacy (B. R. Rubin 1995). Thus, contemporary regimes of power are essentially woven and sustained transnationally (Sassen 2008). Ahram (2011a) makes the point that many of today's states are not monopolists and do not even aspire to be so. They maintain order through brokering arrangements and the decentralised means of violence; fiscal extraction and political authority are diffuse and dispersed. Arguably globalisation and structural adjustment programmes placed additional stresses on late developing states and had the effect of accentuating these trends. This means state institutions may exercise public authority in conjunction with international military forces, international organisations and NGOs, local commanders and regional strongmen and tribal leaders.

[8] In exogenous statebuilding earlier notions of legitimacy derived from conquest, Islam and nationalism have been replaced by the discourse of good governance and service delivery, which is performance-dependent and less durable.

IV. Patrimonial practices and the institutionalisation of power

In this section I explain the relevance of brokerage politics and patrimonial networks and practices to my research. In pre-industrial society there was great inequality of power and access to resources. Court society, discussed above, represented a highly centralised patrimonial order, a system of social domination and reproduction based on the figuration of interdependency among a powerful and prestigious elite. Patronage-based relationship between a central ruler, the court elites and local power holders involved highly ritualised and hierarchical relations of power. The social position of the monarch was endowed with extraordinary degree of power (Elias 1983, 2–3). The centralised control of resources by the monopoly ruler solidified the nobility and other elites' dependency on a single social position, that of the absolute monarch. The individual's dependency on the monopoly ruler in turn imposed restraints on his behaviour, rendering him subordinate and a servant of the king.

In early modern Europe shrinking resources (primarily land) prompted military rulers to wage war and expand their domain, resulting in the accumulation of new lands and the removal of a large number of rivals from the competition. The mechanism of monopoly formation corresponded to a situation in which the accumulation of the most important means of production are progressively held in 'fewer and fewer hands - earlier the accumulation of land and, later that of money'. This movement eventually approached 'a state in which all opportunities are controlled by a single authority'. A system with open opportunities in which control over the means of production was in the hands of many had been transformed into one of closed opportunities. As a result '*fewer and fewer will control more and more opportunities*' and more and more people will become dependent on an ever-decreasing number of ruling elites (ibid 1982, 2:106). Monopoly formation not only made others dependent on a central ruler, he in turn is made dependent on local clients. With the expansion of the royal domain, the ruler's need for a large bureaucracy to administer the territories increased – this added to the weight of bureaucrats which in the long run led to the emergence of 'infrastructural power', thus reducing the need for raw coercive power in managing social relations of domination (Mann 1984). In this way the transfer of redistributive function of monopolies from a single ruler to a government bureaucracy dominated by contending elites was gradually achieved.

Moreover, with the growing industrialisation and urbanisation of society and bureaucratisation of power the centre of gravity in the interdependence between the monopoly ruler and his court elites and the masses gradually shifted in favour of the latter. Newly empowered groups, government functionaries and the bourgeoisie emerged with their own demands on a share of economic privileges and state power. Private monopoly rule (won by a central ruler in contests of elimination and accumulation over several generations) is eventually socialised and becomes public or state monopoly rule. At this stage of development the struggle for monopolies is no longer aimed at their destruction but rather is a struggle for control of their yields and its distribution - how privileges or rents are to be allocated to contending elite groups. Permanent state institutions are formed to control the monopoly apparatus and the allocation of privileges to elites. The direct use of force is now largely excluded from the competition for power and resources among the ruling elites (Elias 1982, 2:104–115). The monopoly mechanism involved two main phases: first, the phase of free competition in which resources were accumulated in fewer and fewer hands, the phase of monopoly formation. In the second phase control over the centralised and monopolised resources passed from the central ruler to an ever greater number of people, 'the phase in which a relatively "private" monopoly becomes a "public" one' (ibid 1982, 2:115). As the monopoly regime expanded to include emerging elite groups, so did the state's institutional framework (see chapter 4 for changes in the nature of patrimonial rule in Afghanistan over time). This relates to a shift from princely or kingly rule – in which sovereignty resided in the king or prince – to territorial nation states in which popular sovereignty and authority was dispersed in multiple institutional forms.

As previously explained, centralisation of power entailed the creation of monopolies as a means of creating interdependencies between a central ruler, members of the royal court and local clients in what is described as a patrimonial system of governance.[9] Differential access to state institutions and the means of production and domination (valuable political and economic resources) played a vital role in generating rents and creating special privileges. Patrimonial orders ensured the political and economic dominance of the ruling

[9] In a traditional patrimonial state sovereign authority is viewed in absolute terms as perquisite of the king (Dorronsoro 2005, 26).

elites by limiting access to these special privileges (i.e. depriving the vast majority of the people from having access to vital political and economic resources in favour of the few 'privileged insiders'); accrued rents were then preferentially distributed to elite groups that dominated the state. The *jagir*[10] system of land grants in the early period of the Durrani Empire (mid-eighteen to mid-nineteenth century) is an example of how elite monopolies and patron-client relations operated in Afghanistan (see chapter 4). The central ruler awarded local powerbrokers certain economic privileges such as land titles either to reward them for following him into battle or to maintain themselves as his local officials in exchange for which they were required to maintain a specific number of military units on behalf of the ruler for future military conquests. The ruler's main military strength, therefore, derived from the feudal lords and local clients he had endowed with land and tax farming rights.

As noted above, the centralisation of power necessitated the creation of a monopoly apparatus – a system of open opportunities became one of closed opportunities as a result of aggressive accumulation and control of vital political and economic resources by a single authority - the central ruler. It is important to emphasise that the line of inquiry originated by Norbert Elias on the connection between violence, the 'civilizing process', and state-making served as a basis for Charles Tilly's assertion that states arise out of war-making and his emphasis on the state's monopoly of the means of violence as a precondition for state formation. As Gallant argued, although Tilly mentions the role of violent entrepreneurs (bandits, pirates, and militias) in state formation, most of his historical analysis only deals with wars between states (Gallant 1999, 39–40). However, the dynamics of establishing elite privileges and the allocation of key resources in late developing and post-interventionary states require a different theoretical frame. In conflict-affected states power struggles among rival elites is indicative of the decentralisation of violence and the absence of state monopoly over the means of coercion and contested sovereignty. Ahram makes the case that many of today's states, including intervening powers are not monopolists, they maintain order through brokering

[10] *Jagir* refer to land grants used during the Mughal rule in India granted to certain privileged groups such as members of the royal clan, military leaders and tribal khans in lieu of salary and on condition of maintaining a military force on behalf of the ruler.

arrangements and routinely practice violence devolution – that is when states rely on militias to manage violence by proxy (Ahram 2011a, 180–82). In such contexts, where the means of coercion is fragmented, political order is maintained through the forcing of 'inclusive enough' political settlements[11] – these are in effect a bargaining outcome among contending elite groups or warring parties rather than a 'common understanding' between elites.[12] From this perspective, states emerge as 'coalitions of elites' and the 'elite bargain' is essentially about the allocation of rents, which is a particularly contested process in conflict-affected societies. The bargaining process when inclusive enough of the contending elites and when it protects their shared economic interests can lead to stable interdependencies and political order (Di John and Putzel 2009, 4 & 15). These insights into the contested dynamics of states have made important contributions to the shift in analysis from a single powerful central ruler to 'coalitions' of contending elites.

North et al.'s analysis of how societies have dealt in different ways with the problem of violence and the means by which they reduced and controlled violence is considered an important contribution to the debate (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009a). North et al. depart from the dominant liberal perspective that views the state as a single actor with a firm monopoly on violence (Di John and Putzel 2009, 14). Instead, they foreground Hobbes' state of nature by assuming that violence is endemic in society rather than monopolised by the state (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009b, 60–61). Unlike Hobbes who considered the role of an absolute monarch essential to taming violence, North et al. stressed the importance of a 'dominant coalition' and the creation of incentives for rival groups within the coalition to compete over power and resources through non-violent means. The *limited access order* or natural state, as noted by North et al., is ruled by a 'dominant coalition' and the vast majority of people outside the coalition have limited access to privileges and valuable resources and activities (North, Wallis, and Weingast

[11] Political settlements 'manifest themselves in the structure of property rights and entitlements, which give some social actors more distributional advantages than others, and in the regulatory structure of the state' (Di John and Putzel 2009, 4).

[12] Di John and Putzel have defined 'elites' as those in possession of or with the authority to adjudicate over the allocation of valuable political and economic resources, including land, agriculture, manufacturing, finance, and government services. They include government officials, politicians, traditional power brokers, local strongmen, landlords, religious leaders, etc (Di John and Putzel 2009, 15).

2009b, 56). In the natural state individuals and groups with access to violence (violent entrepreneurs) form a dominant coalition; they grant one another special privileges which create limits on the access to valuable political and economic resources as a way to generate rents[13] (Di John and Putzel 2009, 14). By limiting access to these privileges, in other words, the availability of rents creates incentives for members of the dominant coalition or 'privileged insiders' to cooperate with each other rather than to fight - because they know that violence reduces their own rents (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009b, 59). While the availability of rents is a fundamental contributing factor to stability, these privileges hinder economic growth by creating monopolies, rents and unstable property rights which creates its own dilemma for developing countries: the means by which they manage to solve the problem of violence hampers long-term growth (ibid 2009b, 61).

North et al.'s thesis of the *limited access orders* in which the political system manipulates the economic system to generate rents that secure political order (but undermine economic growth) is compelling enough. However, there are obvious limitations which needs to be pointed out, not least the need to account for the role of imperialism and (il)liberal capitalism in the historical development of Western political and economic order. North et al.'s argument that the 'peace' resulting from *limited access orders* hinders economic growth and, to paraphrase Collier, is development in reverse - like the idea that 'war is development in reverse', reflects a certain ideological position rather than historical reality (Cramer 2006a). The idea that rents and monopolies hurt economic growth has been rejected by Mushtaq Khan, who offers valuable insights into the growth-enhancing role of some rents and the entrenched nature of patron-client relationships in developing countries. He argues that high corruption in some contexts (Thailand, South Korea) coincided with higher economic growth (Khan and Jomo 2000, 84). Moreover, North et al.'s account largely ignores the transnational dimensions of power and market relations. Globalisation and structural adjustment programmes imposed by donors on

[13] According to Mushtaq Khan '*rents* refer to 'excess incomes', which in simplistic models, should not exist in efficient markets'. Rents occur when a person 'earns an income higher than the minimum that person would have accepted, the minimum being usually defined as the income in his or her next-best opportunity' (Khan and Jomo 2000, 21).

Third World countries result in pressure on governments and 'coalitions' in power to liberalise their markets and open up to market competition (in other words remove the monopolies and rents), which would hinder the ability of domestic elites to sustain *limited access orders*. Giustozzi argues that 'the success of North et al. might in part be due to the fact that they manage to reconcile a recognition of the role of violence in state-building, while pointing towards an historical pattern and a strategy (the Western democracies, institutions-building), which essentially ends up expunging violence from the picture' (Giustozzi 2011, 7).

The *limited access orders* hypothesis does not adequately account for the role of external powers in post-interventionary states. In Afghanistan, the broader international military/aid architecture changed the rules of the game and created the incentives for local elites not to fight; the initial power struggles among local commanders were unlike the violent struggles of the 1990s - large-scale violence was averted and competition over power and resources was mainly pursued non-violently for the control of rents generated by the international war-and-aid economy. This transnational political economy created the 'conditions of possibility' for domestic elites to consolidate power (see chapter 5). However, as argued later, when from mid-decade onwards the US military began to arm local militias outside central government control, including private security companies and anti-Taliban militias in response to the insurgency it hindered the ruling regime's ability to maintain the tenuous control that had been achieved over local armed groups and patronage flows during the first half of the decade. The US military in the ALP case and International Financial Institutions in relation to structural adjustment programmes and international corporations in relation to the market make it difficult for domestic elites to pursue unfettered rent seeking activities and maintain coalition politics – that does not mean that it can't happen. As such, from a liberal perspective, as noted by Wilde, 'patron–client relations are often seen as informal institutions, parallel structures and signs of deficient statehood' (Wilde 2013, 59). In Afghanistan's case the argument is that 'patronage and asymmetric power relations were conducive to modern state-building processes' (ibid 2013).

V. Liberal peacebuilding and violent conflict

In this section I outline the liberal perspective on violence and conflict and how it relates to the institutionalisation of power and the establishment of political order. It has been argued that as inter-state wars receded after the end of Cold War, in its place a new type of organised violence sprung up consisting of a mixture of war, organised crime and massive violations of human rights, typically leading to the reversal of previous developmental gains (Kaldor 1999). These so called 'new wars' happened as discrete events in weak or failed states, driven by a mixture of 'greed and grievances' and the attainment of material rewards through conflict (Berdal and Malone 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Keen 2008). The places where such wars occurred became the opposite mirror image of the liberal West symbolised by its uninterrupted peace and prosperity contrasted to the anarchy and violence of the Third World.

Others disagreed, showing that these so called 'new wars' represented the 'conscious adaptations in the South to global economic restructuring dominated by Northern interests' (Richards 2005a, 3; Duffield 2001). In a deregulated world economy, the same processes that increased global trade and communications also led to the proliferation of trade in arms, money laundering and drug trafficking. Duffield argued that the underlying structures of the global economic system rather than Third World poverty are responsible for violence and underdevelopment in the developing world. The Western framing of development and peacebuilding interventions are designed in such a way so as to manage the exclusion of the global poor through strategies of control and containment of populations in the developing countries (Duffield 2001; Duffield 2007, 3–4).

Cramer argues that the neoliberal view of war and violent conflict (as development in reverse) is ahistorical and inaccurate. Violence can lead to new political and economic arrangements and its outcomes can indeed be positive (Cramer 2006a). On a historical trajectory the US robber barons, the enclosures in England, the violence and exploitation of colonialism, the origin of the nation-state and contemporary conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate the centrality of coercion to political and market relations (Cramer 2006b). Wars require mobilisation of economic resources, creating opportunities for some groups to accumulate significant wealth. After a phase of free competition and

coercive accumulation, monopoly formation meant the closure of direct access to certain resources for increasing numbers of people and the progressive centralisation of the control of these resources in the hands of fewer and fewer individuals, a process which over time led to a more diverse capitalist development in Europe. The war in Afghanistan resulted in new class formations: local commanders and regional strongmen, following the logic of the monopoly mechanism, progressively centralised the control of key resources and commercial activities, including drugs during the war years generating significant level of personal wealth (B. R. Rubin 2000; Giustozzi 2007). The fortunes made and the political and military positions established during wartime then became the foundation for a highly unequal post-2001 neoliberal economic development largely dominated by military commanders-turned-politicians and businessmen (Cramer 2006b; Forsberg 2010; Aikins 2012).

The liberal peace thesis is based on the idea that 'since liberal states do not go to war with each other', then it logically follows that the solution to violent conflict 'is to export liberal forms of state building' to the Third World (Mac Ginty 2010, 394). International interventions ostensibly attempted to 'end war' by imposing a 'liberal peace' (Richards 2005, 3). It was assumed that political and economic liberalisation had the potential to 'release the naturally peaceable nature of human society' (Cramer 2006b). What was needed was 'a strong dose of orthodox development policy (good governance, democratisation, privatisation and economic deregulation)' to cure the problem of violent conflict (ibid 2006b). The simultaneous pursuit of conflict resolution, market sovereignty and liberal democracy rarely, if at all, resulted in liberal peace (Pugh, Cooper, and Goodhand 2004). Critics argued that liberal peacebuilding often ''romanticizes the local' as victims or illiberal; builds hollow institutions; designs economic life to reproduce assertive capitalism; equates peace with statebuilding' (Pugh cited in Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). This flawed understanding of violent conflict, they argued, has frequently led to ahistorical visions of reconstruction.

There are different strands within the critique of liberal peacebuilding; the realist critique is that peacebuilding interventions hardly ever work and wars should be left to run their course (Luttwak 1999). The critical international relations position views peacebuilding as either a neo-colonial technology of containment or a Trojan horse for greater

interventionism, leading to the radicalisation of both development and security discourses (Jabri 2010; Duffield 2007; Richmond 2008b). The critical political economy perspective views peacebuilding as an attempt to 'transform political economies [in post-conflict societies] into an aggressive neoliberal order of deregulation, privatization, marketization and international competition' (Pugh 2005; Pugh 2012, 416). These two critical strands tend to view liberal peacebuilding as an homogenous Western hegemonic project with a singular logic and rationality and coherent set of discourses and practices. This meant emancipatory alternatives needed to be found that accommodated the roles and interests of domestic elites in peacebuilding projects, which led to more bottom up, 'hybrid' approaches to peace (Mac Ginty 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013).

The 'saving liberal peace' (Paris 2010) critique does not problematise the relations of power and the motives of external interveners, but questions the suitability of Western ideals of democracy and free market in contexts where they can be counterproductive. The core assumptions of the liberal peace that democracy and the free market will ensure peace and economic development were found to have undermined the effectiveness of international peacebuilding/statebuilding efforts (Chandler 2010, 142). Countries emerging from conflict, as noted by this critique, lacked the necessary institutional framework to deal with pressures associated with political and market competition. Peacebuilding interventions in their pursuit of instant liberalisation and privatisation intensified conflict and encouraged rivals to continue their struggle for power through electoral contests and the capture of lucrative markets (including international military and development contracts spending). Shock therapy peacebuilding undermined the construction of both state and market institutions needed for peaceful regulation of disputes and maintaining peace (Barnett and Zuercher 2009, 24).

This policy oriented critique of peacebuilding challenged the idea of a quick fix in overcoming the violent dynamics of post-war transition and advocated 'institutionalization before liberalization' in order to establish the regulatory frameworks needed to manage competition among contending elites and to ensure a gradual and peaceful transition to democracy and free market economy – and signified the convergence between peacebuilding and statebuilding practices (Paris 2004; Paris and Sisk 2009). The liberal critique, which is found in policy debates on post-war transition

makes the case that it is not liberal enough and shock therapy needs to be more 'shocking' and better coordinated – Collier for example argues that post-war societies are particularly fertile ground for rapid growth (Collier and Hoeffler 2002).

Liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions take their liberal goals as a given, but often employ illiberal methods such as using war to introduce liberal ideas and institutions to Third World countries (Jabri 2010; Duffield 2007). As the Afghan case show, liberal peacebuilding was not the only game in town. From an analytical perspective 'a liberal framing of intervention' and the frequent failures in post-conflict spaces 'misses the abiding influence of imperialism, geopolitics, and non-liberal political strategies and ideologies' and in the final analysis is 'reductionist in the extreme' (Goodhand and Sedra 2013, 241).

VI. Local militias and exogenous statebuilding

The relationship between local militias and non-state armed groups, failed states and liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding discourses is expanded upon further in this section. In the state formation literature warlords and military leaders are cast as important figures in the processes of state formation and centralisation of power, essentially as state-makers. In contrast, in the new wars debate warlords and militia commanders are characterized as agents of violence and destruction (Kaldor 1999). They are seen as potent examples of medieval savagery and pre-modern irrationality, antithetical to social order and in opposition to the state. Through their centrifugal tendencies they weaken central authority and decentralise the means of violence, reversing the accumulation and consolidation of the means of violence in the hands of central rulers. From this perspective warlords and militia leaders are medieval throwbacks properly belonging to a violent past that the developed world has left behind. They have no place either in today's civilised and cosmopolitan global society.[14]

[14] The term warlord (*jangsalar* in Dari) has negative connotations for many Afghans and since 2002 is commonly associated with mujahedin factional leaders and commanders because of the destructive role they played in the contests for power following the collapse of the Soviet-backed government in 1992. In the 1990s the term 'commander' was more commonly used to describe mujahedin and pro-government

According to this perspective, armed non-state actors are 'antagonistic to the state and harbingers of anarchy' and their presence is viewed as 'the ultimate abnegation of state authority and indication that a state has failed' (Ahram 2011a, 176). This points to a state-centric understanding of security based on the assumption that states generally hold a monopoly of the means of violence. It stems from a concern that 'the inability of a government to develop a coercive apparatus or achieve a hegemonic position in society can lead nonstate actors to challenge its sovereignty' and implies that 'if the state is not capable of exerting control, then chaos must ensue' (Mampilly 2011, 7). Visions of society wrecked by violence in the absence of centralized authority are part of the original myth of the state stretching back to Hobbes (Hobbes 1996).

Liberal versions of the state, as noted by Giustozzi, have been overwhelmingly influenced by Lock and Rousseau and not enough by Hobbes and Machiavelli – although 'in the real world the opposition is not between Hobbes and Kant, that is between political realism and idealism, but between Hobbes and Machiavelli, that is between different types of political realism' (Giustozzi 2011, Preface vii–viii). Something else is obviously at work here besides the idea that the source of peace lie in a social contract; the idea of 'a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of

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militia leaders (see for example Dorronsoro 2005). The etymological notion of the term 'warlord' varies considerably in the literature; in historical political economy it refers to military leaders/rulers and armed predators that played a key role in the global spread of capitalism and processes of state formation (Gallant 1999; Olson 1993; Tilly 1992; Tilly 2003a; Giustozzi 2009b). Gallant offers a glossary of relevant terms to describe armed predators – pirate, privateer, bandit, brigand, military entrepreneur, man of violence, rebel, and chief. These so called men of prowess mediated between the centre and its margins, helping to consolidate state power in the periphery (McCoy 1999). Some have criticised the analytical value of the term warlord when used negatively to describe all sorts of actors, not all of them benefiting from warfare, and local security structures that happened to have little in common (Schetter, Glassner, and Karokhail 2007; Giustozzi 2003). In the debate on state failure, scholars understood warlords as competing military elites and discrete from the state, primarily motivated by the pursuit of economic gain – they were considered an impediment to the establishment of state power – modern states were meant to supplant warlords (Reno 1998; MacKinlay 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Reno for example distinguishes between states and warlords on the basis of collective versus private interests or the triumph of informal networks (shadow state) over formal state bureaucracies. In the post-2001 political landscape, the negative connotations associated with the word 'warlord' was mainly used to criticise the inclusion of factional leaders and mujahedin commanders in the post-Taliban administration (Johnson and Leslie 2004; Chayes 2006; Rashid 2009). Afghan 'warlords' frequently denounced the term as an insult to the mujahedin and their role in liberating the country from Soviet occupation and later the Taliban, viewing it as an attempt to sideline them from power (Mukhopadhyay 2009).

government' (Tilly 1985, 169). This liberal view of the state and the good society tends to edit out the constitutive role of violence.

Modern states are defined by their monopoly of the legitimate use of large-scale violence within a given territory (Weber 1958). They maintain standing armies and police forces, while eliminating militias and gangs (Migdal 1988, 18). Consequently, 'only impotent, failed, or otherwise deficient states would permit such nonstate actors to exist' (Ahram 2011b, 129). Their presence is believed to lead to the abnegation of state authority, decentralisation of violence, escalation of conflict and ultimately state failure (Klare 2004; Bates 2008; Rotberg 2004). Under the existing peacebuilding paradigm the priority for intervening powers at war's end has been rebuilding state institutions. From this perspective, re-asserting the state's monopoly over the means of coercion, including through disarmament and demobilisation of combatants and the building up of new security forces is a key element of institutional control over coercion (Sedra 2003; Bhatia and Sedra 2008; Ghani and Lockhart 2009).

However, the relationship between militias and state breakdown is a complex one as states in addition to regular forces have frequently relied on local militias as an instrument of control (policing) and expanding central power (Barkey 1994; Noelle 1997; Ahram 2011b). Historically, states and imperial powers acted as brokers rather than monopolists of violence depending on how profitable it was to administer certain territories: areas that returned rich dividends were administered directly, while poorer outlying areas were controlled through local power brokers, militias and bandits (Coronil and Skurski 2006; Barkey 1994; Abdul-Jabar and Dawod 2003; Barfield 2010; Marsden and Hopkins 2011). Mann pointed out that 'Most historic states have not possessed a monopoly of organised military force and may have not even claimed it' (Mann 1986, 1:11). Even in powerful centralised polities 'from Ming China… to the Ottoman Empire … to early modern Europe… states have been surrounded by rival claimants to the use of violence. This meant that rather than negating state authority, many of these non-state actors sought to be co-opted into state structures by receiving titles and governorships, contributing to varying dynamics of competition, negotiations, and collusion' (Ahram 2011a, 177). Many states tolerated the presence of other small-scale holders of violence within their realms so long as they collectively did not possess more coercive means than

its central rulers (Giustozzi 2011). In reference to Ottoman Turkey, Barkey argued that 'small scale banditry was often used as a rationalization for further policing and control, but it also led to more organised banditry, which succeeded in forcing the state to bargain, co-opt, or fight, and therefore consolidate' (Barkey 1994, 13).

Ethnographies of the state point to the fragmented and contested nature of power and political authority, in which 'the state …is itself a site of struggle' and has to be understood 'as a theatre in which resources, property rights, and authority are struggled over' (Moore 1993, 389). The state is therefore not an abstract entity, separate from society that benignly provides services and representation to the people. Yet, Weber's ideal-type definition of a singular, dominant, bounded and representative model of centralised power remains the main reference point for understanding contemporary states and statebuilding projects in post-conflict spaces. Over time the shortcomings of international statebuilding became evident (Mayall and de Oliviera 2011; Suhrke 2013). Scholars argued that statebuilding from the outside had little chance of taking root in contested environments where control over the state itself and resistance to foreign occupation contributed to the continuation of violence and limited success in building liberal institutions (Suhrke 2011b; Goodhand and Sedra 2013). Critics of the failed state debate and its associated statebuilding discourse argue that liberal ideologies are deployed to disguise underlying sets of interests and practices which serve to entrench global hierarchies of power.

One variant of the statebuilding critique has been to advocate and indeed valorise 'traditional' and 'local' forms of authority as explored further in chapter 6. Transformative liberal ambitions have been scaled back with a shift toward 'the local' and more embedded and supposedly authentic and legitimate forms of governance, including traditional and customary actors and institutions (Boege, et al. 2009; Mac Ginty 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). It partly emerged in response to the critique of the dominant liberal peace model as an all-powerful, coherent and hegemonic project of liberal internationalism allowing little role for domestic actors in deciding their future. Hybrid peace is produced as a result of routine collaborations and contestations among a composite of local and international hierarchies of power (Mac Ginty 2010, 397). Hybrid governance is partly an analytical or *descriptive* tool, which recognises that in fragile

states political authority is fragmented and competing logics of order coexist and overlap (Meagher 2012, 1075). The state is one among many social organisations that provide security, welfare and representation (Boege, et al. 2009, 606). This notion of hybridity is contrasted with a singular, coherent and dominant notion of the Western state. Not only Western (state-based) and non-Western (tribal and stateless) societies are clearly differentiated, in addition state and non-state, formal and informal forms of orders are also distinguished from one another.

Hybrid governance, however, has also become a *prescriptive* tool – something to be consciously sought after and nurtured. Customary institutions and traditional leaders and informal security forces such as rebels groups and militias who until a few years ago were seen as agents of greed, violence and destruction are increasingly represented as potential sources of order and state formation. This normative and theoretical shift has come about, Meagher writes, as a result of a shift from Weberian to Tillyan models of state formation. New metaphors like 'governance without government', 'mediated states' and 'hybrid political orders' emerged suggesting that 'violence and rival forms of order and authority are part of more authentic processes of state building rather than symptoms of criminality or state failure' (Meagher 2012, 1074).

The hybrid perspective appears to offer a radical critique of liberal orthodoxy. A closer reading, however, reveals the ideological and orientalist connotations of some of the hybridity literature. Social life in these so called 'traditional communities' and 'stateless societies' is described as consisting of people who perceive themselves as belonging to sub-national groupings like tribe, kin group or village but not as citizens or nationals. People in such societies have confidence in their local community and its leaders but have no trust in the government or state institutions.[15] The state is perceived as an external alien force and the people are only loyal to their kinship group but not to the state. Legitimacy rests with leaders of the groups, not with state authorities (Boege, et al. 2009, 603–06). When faced with such forms of discursive representations, we have to repeatedly remind ourselves of the danger of valorising the local, the traditional, the

[15] American anthropologist Thomas Barfield describes life in Imam Sahib district in Kunduz province in the 1960s-70s in more or less similar terms (Barfield 2013).

tribal, the informal, and the hybrid. Hybridity is neither necessarily complementary nor emancipatory, but often results in greater societal insecurity. As Bertelsen showed in the case of Mozambique, legal pluralism and hybrid regimes of authority can increase insecurity for people as they often cannot decide who to turn to in times of need or which actors or institutions have jurisdiction, resulting in the erosion of accountability (Bertelsen 2009).

There remains a significant gap between the ideal 'image' of the state depicting a singular, unitary and autonomous organisation and the everyday 'practices' of state institutions which are fragmented and contradictory (Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 4). Neoliberal interventions routinely constrain the state's autonomy and sovereignty (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). At the same time statebuilding interventions involve contestations over power and resources. State sovereignty is routinely contested and negotiated among local and global elites. Local power holders are not powerless in these contests as they gain opportunities to access global resources and build their own power bases (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008; Heathershaw 2013).

VII. Post-interventionary states and transnational fields of power

Anthropological and political economy studies of the state have contributed to new ways of conceptualising transnational power relations and the contingent nature of political authority. Historicised accounts of state sovereignty shows that 'the initial 'absolutist' vision of the sovereign and law-giving monarch under the sole authority of God has given way to a variety of approaches that are sensitive to current global mosaic of power and domination' (Bertelsen 2009, 136). Governmentality studies[16] introduced the notion of dispersed power and the multiplicity of ways that power (and sovereignty) manifests itself in modern society. It implicated a variety of actors, institutions and daily practices beyond the confines and dominance of the state (J. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Lund

[16] In the broader sense governmentality studies (Foucault 1991; Foucault 2007) show the transition from absolute rule with all sovereign power in the hands of a single monarch to modern bureaucratic forms of dispersed power nested in multiple institutional forms and in variety of everyday situated practices. The dominant image of the state as a unitary and coherent organisation is contrasted with the everyday practices involving fragmentation and contestation of authority by a multiplicity of sovereigns (Bertelsen 2009).

2006; Hansen and Stepputat 2006). This points to cases where 'the lines between state and society, public and private, formal and informal, and legal and illegal are blurred', problematising existing theoretical perspectives built on these binary opposites (Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 2). The abstract binary division between a Western (singular and dominant) and a non-Western (fragile and contested) model of the state prompted scholars to suggest breaking out of the 'one sovereign perspective' which has dominated statebuilding discourse (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008, 269). They emphasised the need to focus on *processes* and the multiplicity of institutional forms and multiple sovereignties involved in the exercise of modern power (Bertelsen 2009).

The idea of a nationally-bounded, singular and coherent organisation is a misrepresentation of how contemporary modern states, as *transnational* modes of power relations actually perform (Heathershaw 2013). Foucault has demonstrated that the modern state has never had at any time in its history 'this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality… whose importance is a lot more limited than any of us think' (Foucault 1991, 103). Under such conditions multiple, fragile, and contested centres of power and authority emerge claiming sovereignty; the state is one institutional form among many others exercising public authority (Lund 2006). In colonial and post-colonial societies sovereign authority had been historically delegated to many forms of local authority, tribal chiefs for example (Mamdani 1996). State sovereignty emerges as a partial and incomplete achievement and always reversible (T. B. Hansen and Stepputat 2006).

The problem with contemporary statebuilding discourse relates to how the modern state is conceptualised. The 'image' of the state as the singular source of sovereign power is based on 'an exaggeration, the over-statement of a particular characteristic' in Weber's ideal-type to allow for comparisons (Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 3). The notion of the state 'as a monopolist of legitimate physical violence, as an autonomous bureaucratic apparatus, as the embodiment of popular sovereignty, and as a spatially and territorially coherent entity' remains an abstract and not a real entity (Schlichte quoted in Hagmann and Péclard 2010, 540–41). These state attributes are constantly reproduced through repetitive performances and bureaucratic practices which reinforce the state's dominant image – a process that Mitchell has termed 'the state effect' (Mitchell 1991). Gupta

draws attention to the imageries, symbols and discourses and the ways in which ordinary people imagine and represent the state in their everyday lives reinforcing that image (Gupta 1995, 390–93). However, when 'real states fell short of the standard all sorts of words had to be invented to express the gap between actual practices and the ideal' (Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 11). They included metaphors like 'quasi-states, soft states, shadow states, weak states, non-state states' (ibid 2005). I have deliberately resisted the temptation to use these terms in relation to the Afghan state since they are based on dualist explanations and polarised ideal abstractions – such as the binary division between formal and informal.

Like other globally oriented organisations (NGOs, multi-national corporations) modern states are in some respects local and global at the same time; they are *transnational* (James Ferguson quoted in Schouten 2009, 4). Sassen (2008) argues that in today's neoliberal political economies the study of states as neither global nor national but rather as *transnational* processes implicates the 'complexities of the global flows, identities, and globalized machineries and regimes of governance' (Bertelsen 2009, 135) in the workings of national states. Just as 'the global' works through 'the national', similarly the national attempts to work through the global. Contemporary national states routinely operate and maintain themselves through the global regimes of power and hierarchies (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008, 271).

Under such circumstances the forces which compromise state sovereignty emerge not only from above (globalisation) or below (tribal uprising), they are more complex, enmeshed and integrated and often escape the strictures of singular notions and neat divisions between the international and the national or between state and non-state (Heathershaw 2013). The state does not necessarily recede into the background and decay away as the forces of globalisation (deregulation and privatisation) advance, but amount to new transnationally woven hierarchies of power which create new limitations as well as offer new opportunities for exercising agency and accumulating power. For example, 'the global' can be clothed in 'the local' and empower what are conceived as 'tribal' systems of local governance (jirga) and security (arbaki) (see chapter 6). In that sense not all transnational influences are modernising, in particular contexts they may reinforce

tendencies towards the 're-tribalisation' of society and cruder political technologies of rule.

The perspective of *global assemblages* rejects the notion of singularly bounded monolithic and competing orders and unsettles the binary between the national and the global as two mutually exclusive and distinct entities (Sassen 2008). As is evident from the term, the analytic of *assemblages* allows for different constellations of power and regimes of rule to coexist and operate through each other - which points to the contested and fragmented nature of sovereignty. An assemblage is understood as an ad-hoc grouping of heterogeneous elements that at some point come together, not as a 'seamless whole' - assemblages 'have no unity other than "co-functioning", and they have no essence… but rather involve relations between elements that are contingent and unstable, requiring [continuous] work to be held together' (Bachmann, Bell, and Holmqvist 2015, xvii).

What emerge from these studies is the insightful observation questioning a priori the existence and dominance of, and binary divisions between distinct orders and monolithic fields of power (the market, the state, the society, the tribe). There is a tendency in the literature to infer from separate and contending realms of authority, or in Edwards' terminology competing 'moral orders' (tribe, state and Islam) that are in many respects incompatible with one another (D. B. Edwards 1996, 4). In such rendering based on the static freeze-frame image of the Weberian state these distinct orders appear as enduring competitors in terms of claims over political legitimacy and the right to rule, adjudicate disputes and exercise violence that have historically undermined political stability in Afghanistan (D. B. Edwards 2002; Hopkins 2008; Barfield 2010). However, other sources have highlighted instances where rulers relied on more than one source of legitimacy by combining elements from all these contending sources of authority (Ghani 1978; Nawid 1999; Dorronsoro 2005). To some extent the literature on warlord-governance (Giustozzi 2009b) and strongman-governance (Mukhopadhyay 2014) that draws on a mix of *weak* formal institutions and *strong* informal power have maintained these distinct if at times shifting boundaries and oppositional notions between the state and its erstwhile competitors.

A sufficiently in-depth historical (and sociological) approach to the study of political authority is an attempt at ensuring the historicity of states and societies in relation to broader global processes (Elias 1982; Berman and Lonsdale 1992). Such a perspective guards against over-reliance on universal, generalised and ahistorical templates and binary notions of Western and non-Western political experiences reflected in the characterisation of strong (Western) bureaucratic states versus weak (Third World) patrimonial states respectively. It provides a corrective to dominant liberal notions positing autonomous spheres of public and private, state and society and state and market. Yet, great variations can be found in historical accounts dealing with the history of state-society relations. The consolidation of political authority in what is generally assumed to be a segmentary tribal society has produced a variety of competing conceptual frames as further developed in chapter 6. The critical examination of such historical accounts is particularly relevant given the interest that foreign militaries have shown in tribes and native culture. The US military's 'cultural turn' (Gregory 2008) and attempts to map the 'human terrain' in occupied zones (González 2010) are significantly influenced by the historical knowledge gathered over time since Afghanistan's first colonial encounter in the early 19th century - there is great asymmetry in power relations in discursive terms that needs to be recognised.

The ALP militias that drew on the tribal policing concept of arbaki and local governance shuras established by US forces, as explored in the empirical chapters were products of neither global nor local manifestations of power – both sets of interventions were justified by invoking the notion that in the land of the tribes 'all politics is local' (Jones 2009). They were a mixture of local-global and as such constituted a transnational regime of power. Likewise, the nineteenth century tribal militias employed by British colonial authorities in the frontier areas between India and Afghanistan were a transnationally constituted military labour force (Marsden and Hopkins 2011). Colonial systems of indirect rule had been based on globally-oriented and locally-hinged hierarchies of power that typically produced fragmented forms of political authority. Today's transnational mechanisms of control have similarly empowered particular groups (tribal leaders, local commanders, women's activists, NGO bosses) as intermediaries to help facilitate the interface between the global and local relations of power. Local clients often subvert and

re-work global processes to extract resources and ensure their own social reproduction. National elites consolidate power, for example, by redrawing the boundaries of patronage relations linking local powerbrokers to external powers and resource flows. As discussed in chapter 5, President Karzai's attempts to regulate private security companies and local militias established by the US military represented one such attempt at centralisation of power in conditions of fragmented authority. As the empirical chapters demonstrate the processual examination of the ALP validate the analytical tools discussed in this chapter.

VIII. Conclusions

This chapter engaged with newer and older debates in political economy and a range of disciplines in the social sciences about the centrality of violence and the role played by militias, transitional resources and technologies, and patrimonial practices in the processes of state formation. It also critically engaged with neoliberal perspectives on violence, militias, peacebuilding and statebuilding. The chapter drew particular attention to the constitutive relationship between violence, capital flows and patrimonial politics and the emergence of state power by highlighting the valuable insights of Elias, Tilly, Mann, and Barkey, among others.

The constitutive role of coercion, capital and patrimonial practices was highlighted in order to expose the limitations of the liberal position, which tends to edit out the role of violence and contestation over power and resources in statebuilding processes. I have positioned this research within the broader historical political economy literature on violence, militias and patrimonial politics and the contested and varied trajectories of state formation as it provides a corrective to the prevalent liberal discourse, which has been used by Western powers to justify peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions in post-war societies. The discussion of the international statebuilding and its shifting context showed that 'exogenous statebuilding' is a precarious process which in many instances produced uneven and unstable outcomes in post-conflict countries. Finally, the chapter engaged with the transnational dimensions of power configurations and the contested and fragmented nature of sovereignty and political authority in post-interventionary states.

Chapter 3: Methodological approaches and research ethics

I. Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology and the organisation and trajectory of my field research. My choice of methodology, design of field research, and the actual data collection were in large part determined by the fluid nature of the research context - insecurity being one of the major obstacles to accessing field sites and engaging with the various categories of respondents. I begin the chapter by a brief description[17] of the shifting political landscape of Afghanistan after 2001 which formed the backdrop to the processes I ended up researching – US and Afghan government-backed local militias in the form of the ALP. I then outline the research questions and selection criteria for field sites. Next I describe the methodological framework chosen for this study and elaborate upon the trajectory of my field research. Finally, I address the ethical questions related to conducting research in a conflict zone and the challenges and dilemmas associated with doing research on local armed groups in the midst of a larger Western military operation and a deadly insurgency. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the broader political and military context affected my position as a researcher and the day-to-day reality of conducting field research.

II. The shifting political and military landscape

When I began field research in October 2011, Afghanistan had been through exactly ten years of US and NATO military occupation. The military intervention that began in October 2001 led to significant realignment in military power and political forces in the country. It relied on the Northern Alliance, a collection of military factions mainly from northern Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban. The regime change restored the power of mujahedin commanders and factional militias responsible for the infighting and chaos

[17] This section is kept brief because the major events comprising the history of post-2001 Afghanistan is described in greater detail in chapter 5.

that followed the collapse of the Soviet-backed government in 1992. As the empirical chapters demonstrate, the provincial power structures and local security forces became the domain of Northern Alliance military strongmen, in particular Jamiat-linked commander-networks. The central government's tenuous and partial control over the countryside was the result of a series of deals and accommodations with local power holders. The growing insurgency led to increased reliance on jihad networks and local militias. By mid-2000s, the Taliban insurgency had emerged in the south and east of the country. By 2008, the insurgency had spread to the vicinity of Kabul. NATO deployed about 3,000 American troops to Logar and Wardak in order to contain the insurgency. In 2009, the Americans launched the Afghan Public Protection Programme (AP3), a pro-government militia in Wardak supported by the US military. In the lead up to the 2009 presidential election, the insurgency spread further north. In the spring and summer of 2009, Baghlan's capital came under regular attacks by insurgents. At the same time, Kunduz experienced a wave of Taliban violence. Before the arrival of US forces in the north (in 2010), arming local militias constituted the main response to the insurgency.

In mid-2009, ISAF-NATO commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal led an assessment of the military and political situation in Afghanistan. It recommended the deployment of 30,000 additional troops, most of them to the south, east and north of the country. The military surge was accompanied by a counterinsurgency campaign that aimed to improve security, governance and development outcomes - and gave new impetus to arming local militias. The deployment of additional troops resulted in the escalation of conflict. Civilian casualties, already a problem before the arrival of new forces, emerged as a major source of tension between President Karzai and his Western allies. In the summer of 2010, Gen. David Petraeus replaced Gen. Stanley McChrystal as ISAF-NATO commander. During his tenure, the use of night raids by Special Forces and air strikes increased many folds.[18] He also expanded the US-backed local militia programme in the form of the ALP, which allowed the Afghan government to assert some control over local armed groups supported by foreign forces. Following the disputed 2009 presidential elections, relations between Karzai and the Obama administration continued to

[18] Under McChrystal and later Petraeus ISAF's kill-capture operations soared dramatically: from 100-125 to 500 a month in 2009 and to a 1,000 a month in June 2010 (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011).

deteriorate. Karzai became increasingly critical of the US war in Afghanistan – accusing the Americans of behaving like a colonial power (Bobin 2013). Karzai believed the Americans were fighting the war on the wrong side of the Durand Line. He also blamed the Americans for lack of progress in negotiations with the Taliban. During his second term as president, he issued a series of directives banning night raids by foreign forces, restricting the use of air strikes and attempted to extend Afghan sovereignty over local militias and US military prisons. Despite presidential decrees banning night raids by Special Forces and restricting the use of air strikes, US and NATO forces routinely worked around such restrictions. The war crimes, allegedly committed by US Special Forces in Wardak in late 2012, early 2013 are a case in mind (see chapter 6).

As this brief account of the last decade indicated, Afghanistan during my fieldwork was a violent and chaotic place. It was not the ideal research context for standard anthropological ethnographic practice, the classic model of bounded ethnography involving the participation of the researcher in the daily lives of the people, spending extended periods of time living among them, developing intimate relationships with the locals, observing ancient customs and practices, listening to folklore, asking questions and collecting data to make sense of the issues and then writing thick descriptions in the form of case notes. It was evident that in such a volatile context the most relevant research methods were those that offered flexibility and allowed for greater adaptability in planning and execution of research, as and when political dynamics changed. The extended case method, which I describe below, developed the notion of multi-sited fieldwork, which allowed me to interact with, trace and follow processes and actors-and-practices associated with my research topic in multiple locations without the need for prolonged physical presence at a particular field site. This particular methodology made it possible to gather data from various sources and settings and combine open-source material, such as media and research reports with classified (but leaked) official documents and key informant interviews. The expansion of the insurgency from south to north and the experimental nature of militia programmes, as they travelled from one context to the next – from Wardak where US-backed militias were first formed to Baghlan and Kunduz where its later iterations emerged - were well suited to the extended case methodology.

III. Research design

Research objectives

The research explores the role of the Afghan Local Police (and its previous incarnations) in shaping contestations between different elite groups over the control of the means of violence and the flow of patronage at both the national and local level. It focuses on particular episodes of conflict, using them as an entry point to analyse violence, elite bargaining, and state consolidation in the context of the post-2001 NATO involvement and the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. Understanding the competing interests and contradictory logics behind the formation of local militias offers important insights as to why so many local armed groups continue to play such a critical role in the dynamics of contested settings such as Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz. Less clear, however, were the political outcomes of the bargaining processes over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion, and the linkages that tied together local, national and international fields of power. The research, therefore, seeks to understand the extent to which local militias, particularly the ALP have contributed to local conflict dynamics, contestations over the control of resources and local armed groups, and processes of centralisation of power and state consolidation.

Fieldwork sites and selection criteria

This research seeks to examine the processes through which the ALP and its previous iterations were established in three Afghan provinces: Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz. In addition to fieldwork in the three provinces, research was also conducted in Kabul to explore national level processes. Field research for this study was carried out between September 2011 and May 2013. The selection of the three case studies was based on the following criteria: Wardak was chosen because it constituted the first joint US-Afghan government effort to set up local militias and provided the intellectual soil for similar initiatives elsewhere. Baghlan and Kunduz were chosen because both provinces, like Wardak, became strategically important in relation to the insurgency after 2009. Each became a site of experimentation in militia formation, leading to very different outcomes.

The three cases were selected for a comparative analysis because the ALP and other militias have played an important role in the political and security dynamics of each of these settings. Moreover, the differences and similarities across cases in terms of social structures, economic development, political history and conflict dynamics, notably the role of foreign forces, make for revealing comparisons. As I explain below, the validity of cases is not necessarily dependent on how representative the different cases are. Rather, the emphasis is on the quality of the analysis and the extent to which case analysis provides a plausible account of a given process.

Research questions

In order to assess how the ALP and its previous iterations have shaped security and political dynamics in Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz in the period following the US intervention in 2001, this research sought to answer the following core research questions:

1. What were the underlying rationales and interests behind arming local militias from mid-2000s onward?

   This question sought to capture the shifting logics and the contradictory processes that resulted in the formation of local militias.

2. Who were the main actors and institutions influencing the processes of militia formation and in what ways did they interact with each other?

   This question sought to build the network of relationships involving a host of different actors and institutions.

3. What role did the ALP and other militias play in shaping the motivations of and contestations between different actors and interest groups?

   This question was concerned with the political outcomes of these processes. It sought to capture the dynamics of coercion, contestation and brokerage and their implications for decentralisation or re-centralisation of violence, patronage and state power.

4. How do findings from this research provide new insights into the role of coercion, brokerage and patronage politics in processes of statebuilding in contested environments?

   This question related to the theoretical contribution of the research to the complex interrelationships between coercion, brokerage and patronage politics in emerging political orders.

IV. Research methods

The methodology used in this research builds upon the extended case method or situational analysis first developed by the Manchester School of anthropology (Gluckman 1965; Van Velsen 1964; Burawoy 2000; Evens and Handelman 2006). The anthropologists of the Manchester School made a significant contribution to 'ethnography rich in actual cases' (Long 1992, 161). These micro-histories drew their inspiration from a particular event - 'The opening of the bridge' by Gluckman provides the earliest illustration of a method that focused on events or social situations. The method uses a case or event to shed light on everyday social practices and the complex network of relations that link a variety of different actors and institutions involved in producing relations of domination - and resistance in a specific context. The extended case method is inspired by Gluckman's adage 'follow your nose wherever it leads you' (Handelman 2005, 62), in which events of conflict and contestation or 'event-ful' practice (and not just any event or practice) act as an analytical departure point from which to 'extend out' and build analysis of the broader social and political forces that are actualised in a particular context (Kapferer 2010, 2–5). The method is 'inherently processual, continuously becoming prospective history', and therefore the dynamics of the extended case are temporal; there is no separation between social practice and micro-history – they follow from one another in real time (Handelman 2005, 61–63).

While Gluckman used his case which described the apartheid-era dynamics of Zulu-European relations to 'emphasize endurance, stability and different types of change within a given structure', van Velsen denies the existence of a fixed social structure altogether. The criticism of structural analysis for its emphasis on consistency and neglect

of variability led van Velsen to describe situational analysis as 'a method of integrating variations, exceptions and accidents into descriptions of regularities' and comes close to Foucault's notion of discourse (van Velsen cited in Long 1992, 163). The extended case takes the event as central to analysis rather than the concept of society, which is understood as a bounded phenomenon in structural anthropology and the event is used to substantialise the abstract (society) or to grasp an 'inner meaning' as the general organisational principle of society. Events or situated practices were not to be regarded as typical or as 'apt illustrations' of ethnographic generalisations or as examples of a general pattern of action that might be revealed through research data. The events described by the extended case method are events of conflict or of tension; they are atypical (Kapferer 2010, 2) not suited to the task of proving a general theory or the existence of a causal law - or theorising that sought to present a 'systematizing thought' – referring to thought that 'systematically masks or conceals the dynamics and complexities of social life' (Long 1992, 149). The extend case understood as prospective history does not theorise the forming of social order, instead it focuses on how 'social life is practiced into existence as emergent phenomenon, without assuming or presuming how social order holds together and falls apart' (Handelman 2005, 61). The extended case, therefore, represented a shift away from structural functionalism in anthropology and its tendency to view society as a bounded and institutionally coherent entity (Kapferer 2010, 9).

According to Long, there are many similarities between situational analysis and Foucault's description of discourse. For Foucault 'discourses are not *documents* to be interpreted which will finally reveal their inner meaning, but *monuments* to be described'. Similar to the notion of discourse, 'the analysis of social events cannot reveal some fundamental underlying logic or social order' (Long 1992, 165). Therefore, the limits or constrains on action are defined by actors themselves, through social interactions in specific contexts, involving power relations that both enable and constrain action - not by some coherent set of norms according to which society supposedly functioned. As it happens, social norms are frequently 'translated (by actors) into practices that are ultimately manipulated in social situations in an effort to serve particular ends' (ibid 1992, 163). These methodological developments represented a clear rejection of the notion of an underlying structure or inner meaning that governed social life. This

epistemological perspective rejects dualistic explanations - resulting from an erroneous search for a singular truth or right interpretation – which leads to the drawing of sharp conceptual boundaries based on distinction between object and subject, value and fact, and actor and structure or different domains of authority. Instead, the extended case is mainly concerned with 'axes of practice in particular contexts' (Handelman 2005, 64).

Like Gluckman (1965), Foucault's intention was to show that the human subject is 'produced historically from its social world' (Couzens Hoy 1986, 4–5). In this perceptive, the practice of social life became more complex, less rigid, more contradictory, and less predictable – thus open to more surprises (Handelman 2006, 96–100). Foucault's genealogical inquiry, a method which he labelled 'history of the present' has much in common with situational analysis; both approaches oppose the idea of causality or structuralism. Instead, the methods emphasise the importance of the 'conditions of possibility' or what made the event possible, while refusing any assumptions about the direction of social change. For Foucault 'conditions of possibility' (like the notion of *assemblages* discussed in chapter 2) referred to social situations that may emerge from a combination of heterogeneous elements and circumstances in dispersed and seemingly unconnected field of social activity in such a way as to give rise to some outcome. Genealogical inquiry manifests a commitment to the specificity or uniqueness of historical phenomena. It is for this reason that Foucault insists on the 'event' (Hunt and Wickham 1994, 6). Structuralism 'involves the idea that structures provide the conditions of their own existence, they provide what is necessary for their own continuation or reproduction'. In opposition to this view, Foucault insisted that ''conditions of possibility' are never guaranteed; rather accident and chance play a decisive role' (ibid 1994, 7). Foucault's commitment to historical specificity is related to his concern for discourse: how did it come about that some particular way of organising thinking, talking and doing came to prominence at a particular time, rather than another? (ibid 1994, 7). In each particular context, 'each discourse allows certain things to be said, thought and done and impedes or prevents other things from being said, thought and done' (ibid 1994, 8). Discursive forms are always context specific; discourse encompasses both knowledge and practice, and implicit in this relationship is the problem of power and how various

discursive forms are manipulated by individuals to advance their own interests (Long 1992, 148).

This methodological approach was particularly suitable to the study of local militias in post-2001 Afghanistan. The extended case method's focus on events of conflict and contestation proved crucial to my own research approach, which examined 'critical events' and instances of concrete contestations over the control of armed groups in diverse socio-political contexts in order to understand the broader dynamics of violence and contests over power. The re-mergence of the Taliban in the north, for example, was a moment of great significance for local powerholders whose hold on power had come under threat, which translated into military support for local commanders against the Taliban. Similarly, attempts by US forces to expand local militias outside government control resulted in the 'nationalisation' of militias, involving tighter control over local armed groups employed by foreign forces. The study of situated practices, as opposed to the search for a singular truth, involved teasing out the 'multiplicity of meanings' (ibid 1992, 169) constructed in the course of interactions with local militias in contested environments (see chapters 6, 7 & 8). To understand such constructions, it becomes necessary 'to take account of the negotiations, manipulations and accommodations that become part of the interactions between actors' (ibid 1992, 165). These constructs appear in 'discursive practices that take the form of cultural 'statements' expressed in language, material objects or social practice' (ibid 1992, 165).

Apart from its conceptual value, the extended case method also offered practical possibilities, enabling me to conduct research in situation of ongoing armed conflict. It opened up possibilities for diverse field activities under difficult security conditions, allowing for the gathering of data in multiple locations, without the need for prolonged physical presence at any one particular field site, and from multiple sources using a variety of potential data gathering instruments, including oral histories, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, archival review, participant observation in situ, as well as review of various texts and written documents such as media reports, government policy papers and guidelines, research reports, and listening to recorded sessions of key events and interviews with actors that had been carried out by local journalists and made available to the author. I build part of chapter 8 using a pre-recorded session of a

government disarmament event targeting militias in Khanabad district, Kunduz. As van Velsen emphasised, the review of the material allowed me 'to obtain different accounts and interpretations of the disputes… from a variety of people rather than to search for the right account or interpretation' (van Velsen quoted in Long 1992, 164–65). It is important to seek many interpretations of an event since there are always a multiplicity of meanings that people ascribe to social practices in different contexts. Discourse, therefore, allows for multiple interpretations to emerge from the description of people's negotiations and accommodations as they bargain over access to power and resources in specific contexts.

The use of multiple methods and research tools distinguishes this multi-sited fieldwork from standard ethnographies based on participant observation and prolonged stay in one particular field site (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Robben 2007). The extended case method provided the flexibility and openness to follow 'live' processes and resonated with the 'un-bounded' nature of field research (Burawoy 1991). It made it possible to follow events and processes over time, and from one setting to another. I began researching local militias in Wardak, followed the process to Baghlan, and from there continued the research in Kunduz, whilst moving back and forth between provincial sites and Kabul and London during periods of additional research at national level and taking time for contemplation and writing. It required keeping a constant eye on events and gathering material even while outside the country by following news reports and debates in the media and over the Internet. Given the instability of the research context and the sensitivity of the research topic this methodology offered great flexibility regarding access to field sites and data sources. The research plan frequently changed according to levels of violence, weather conditions, availability of informants, and the ad-hoc (unplanned) nature and the unpredictable trajectory of the processes I ended up following. Opportunities to visit field sites suddenly arose; on a short notice I would learn from local contacts that a high-level official from Kabul was planning to visit the provincial capital of Wardak to witness the graduation of new ALP recruits, which offered a great opportunity to interact with all the different players and local commanders from areas that ordinarily I could not visit due to insecurity. Such moments of opportunity meant I had to constantly update my research plan, abandon planned visits to

field sites and embark on un-planned visits on short notice. This style of doing research inevitably generated intense periods of activity and entailed greater security and ethical challenges which had to be promptly addressed, adding to the inevitable compromises researchers make while operating in insecure environments.

As it turned out, I was able to complete my field research despite such obstacles. The research focused on the emergence and evolution of NATO-and-government-backed local militias in the context of US counterinsurgency. The research for this study was carried out in Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz, three very different provinces with very different security dynamics and power structures. As the methodology suggest, in multi-sited fieldwork the emphasis of research is on multiple connections rather than multiple sites or the greater number of cases for the purpose of building comparisons (Robben 2007, 331). Following the movement of discourse, people, narratives and conflicts, as well as revealing multiple connections between field sites, while bringing to light the processual aspects of the case in a particular context was of greater significance than doing research in multiple locations. In other words, multi-sited fieldwork is not the same as doing fieldwork in multiple locations. It was not the different locations that offered validity to cases, but their interconnections in terms of how a certain practice (militia formation) takes shape in different social contexts and the kinds of political outcomes and multiplicity of meanings which resulted from this process that are considered critical to the framework of this study. Moreover, the different cases did not necessarily have to be representative in order to be counted valid. The validity of cases, to my mind, was not based on the typicality of cases – but on the quality of the analysis and to what extent case analysis established a plausible account about how different elements and circumstances came together to produce an outcome or what made the event possible. It was, therefore, a context specific political economy study of particular locales in each province, looking at the role of coercion and men of violence dating back to the 1980s whose fortunes changed in 2001 due to their role as US military allies in toppling the Taliban regime, and again in 2009 when they received government and later NATO support to rejuvenate their armed networks in preparation for the battle against Taliban insurgents. The extended case method also provided a means to capture the transnational dimension of local practices – local militias trained and financed by foreign forces were

governed by a transnational regime of power with both local and global dimensions. Therefore, trans-local research relies on 'greater variation in methods, informants, and locations' (ibid 2007, 334).

Following this research strategy allowed me to document the various processes that unfolded at both the national and local level when local armed groups were armed by government and foreign forces in support of the counterinsurgency campaign. This often involved retracing some of the processes by obtaining retrospective accounts of events that had occurred before I began my field research. This information was often gathered in multiple locations; local research organisations and journalists in Kabul who reported on local militias were good sources of initial information about cases. Additional data was gathered during field visits - media reports were complemented by personal observation of events and interviews with key informants to develop thick descriptions of each case based on the varied trajectory of the programme in specific contexts. Sometimes the processes moved from one setting to another; acquiring information about incidents of abuse perpetrated by US forces and their Afghan militias in Wardak, which I describe in chapter 6, necessitated retracing the process back in time and space. I began visiting government officials and families of victims in Wardak to build a plausible account of the incidents, starting with initial incident reports, followed by attempts to report these incidents to provincial authorities, who in turn brought them to the attention of US forces. This was followed by retracing incidents when reported to and then debated in local and international media, the parliament, human rights organisations, and eventually the president's office. A further line of inquiry opened while tracing how Afghan officials in Kabul recounted, contextualised and sought investigations from the US and NATO officials in Kabul, and the reasons contestation over the 'facts' of the case and their interpretations eventually led the government to order US forces out of Wardak. This debate eventually got embroiled in a broader debate about the conduct of US forces in Afghanistan and the nature of Afghan-US relations at the time. Acquiring data in different locations and from various sources, while the debates continually changed, was in need of triangulation. As is often the case with controversial issues, there is more than one account of events; information is frequently manipulated by different actors to advance their own interests, including to suppress some voices and promote others

(Goodhand 2000, 12). In this regard the refusal of NATO forces to acknowledge culpability and the pressure they put on families of victims and local officials not to report incidents to the media and officials in Kabul are illustrative. It was not the intention of this research to use the case method to establish causality or prove a general theory. Instead, the focus of the research was on social relations that were actualised in a particular context.

It was not a comparative case study of different sites; the emphasis was not on 'controlled comparisons… but the links that bind all the cases' (Brass 1997, 31). The cases held significance and were 'interesting not because they [were] *representative*, but because… they [were] linked by discourse' (ibid 1997). For this reason, the focus was on events, following the processes and the 'axes of practice in particular contexts' (Handelman 2005, 64). This research strategy made it possible to view the dynamics of power relations in each context and the political outcomes that resulted from the practice of arming local militias. Studying armed groups must be seen in light of historical processes, as emergent regimes of power are reflective of, not occluding previous power relations and discursive practices. For this reason, research must historicise the situated struggles and legacies of violence, as I seek to do in the empirical chapters, because previous sedimentations of power remain consequential and are often reworked in the present (Moore 2005). Retracing situated practices allowed the past and the present to be bridged, revealing the direction of social change – for example, a number of local armed groups I examine in the empirical chapters had survived from the war years in the 1980s and 1990s. As social practices are enacted, enabled and experienced in specific contexts shaped by historical processes, they must be investigated empirically, a research process that is chronicled below.

V. Research trajectory, data access and ethics

I returned home to Kabul in September 2011 to commence my fieldwork. I started out my field research with the exploration of the ALP but soon began to retrace the emergence of the ALP's precursor, the arbaki militias in Baghlan, the most secure of the three field sites (chapter 7). Next I carried out fieldwork in Wardak to retrace the AP3 process and at

the same time followed the ongoing ALP initiative, the successor to AP3 (chapter 6). I then expanded the research to Kunduz where similar to Wardak and Baghlan I began retracing the emergence of the arbaki militias and its transition to ALP (chapter 8). In the summer of 2011, the Americans and their NATO allies had begun the process of withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan. Each year during spring and summer there was an escalation in insurgent violence as the winter lull gave way to spring and insurgents returned from Pakistan for the start of the spring offensive, which continued until late summer. So when I arrived in Kabul, the summer fighting had ended and I looked forward to a 'quiet' winter during which time I planned to conduct most of my field research before things heated up again the next spring. 2011 proved to be the bloodiest year in the decade long Western military occupation of the country (A. J. Rubin 2012a). Although violence somewhat declined in 2012 there was a dramatic increase in violence in the summer of 2013 (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014, 39). Afghanistan during fieldwork would prove to be an unstable research context but one where sufficient awareness of the security and political dynamics and a wide network of personal and professional contacts permitted the type of research I planned to carry out. Therefore, the context had a lot of bearing on the way this research unfolded.

Considering the limitations that the security environment imposed on the research, I spent the first few weeks in Kabul reconnecting with former colleagues and acquaintances in the UN, ICRC, NGOs, research organisations, local media and the government to develop a list of potential contacts and informants in Kabul and in the three field sites. Once I had drawn up a list of contacts and began to identify the key actors in Kabul, I spent those initial weeks visiting the persons and organisations that I thought could bring me up to speed with the dynamics of the ALP in my chosen field sites. The preliminary accounts I established through interviews and informal discussion and the few research and policy reports I gathered during those first few weeks would serve as a basis for the detailed cases that I ended up developing in the course of a year-long field research. A number of local research organizations such as the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) and Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO) were among the first to systematically look into the question of US-and-government-backed local militias, including in Wardak and northern Afghanistan. AAN began debating the wisdom of arming local militias soon

after the local militias emerged in Wardak in early 2009, followed by 'election militias' and CDI/LDI militias in the summer of that year in other parts of the country ahead of the August 2009 presidential election (see chapter 5). In early 2010 AAN published the first comprehensive study of government-backed militias, which traced the emergence and evolution of local militias beginning with the ANAP in 2006 (Lefèvre 2010). This report not only provided a comprehensive background on local militias supported by the government and foreign forces (i.e. the processual history) it also identified a number of potential informants I later interviewed. Around the same time the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) published its first periodic protection of civilians reports, which looked into the role of the ALP in connection with the protection of civilians in armed conflict (UNAMA and AIHRC 2011). In late 2010 PTRO began conducting research among former insurgents in the north many of whom ended up joining the ALP as a source of employment and security guarantees. Findings from this research, discussed with the author in September 2011, generated some useful insights into local security dynamics that paved the way for the emergence of local militias in places like Baghlan (chapter 7). In the autumn and winter of 2010, Human Rights Watch also began to study the rise of local militias and carried out research in a number of locations, including Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz – and published a comprehensive report in September 2011 (HRW 2011). In June 2011 the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission had completed a three-month long research into the ALP, including in my chosen field sites and published a report in April 2012 (AIHRC 2012). The findings from this research were discussed with the author in October 2011. The AIHRC and HRW reports were mainly focused on human rights abuses perpetrated by local militias, but also provided useful background material on the processes I intended to research, including legal aspects of the ALP, institutional mandates and key players.

Once I had identified the main written sources, I began meeting with researchers in those organisations. In addition, a number of local and foreign journalists had periodically reported on the ALP and other local militias. They were often the best source of initial information and connection to authorities in the provincial and central governments as well local notables, ALP commanders and foreign forces. I initially drew on their networks of informants in Kabul and in the provincial sites, which in the course of my

own research I expanded to include many others. These initial weeks and months were crucial as I slowly began to identify the cases (or 'critical events' such as the armed clash between ALP and ANP in Baghlan which I describe in chapter 7) that would become the cornerstone of my empirical chapters. I realised that to really get a proper sense of the events-to-be-reconstructed and the debates at the local level, I would have to travel to the provinces and conduct first hand interviews and observe the processes from up close. In late October 2011, I left Kabul and travelled by road to Baghlan, with the intention of spending a week in Pul-e-Khumri to conduct research. This would be the first time I lived in Baghlan where I had no family connections or professional contacts, so had to rely on a local journalist, whom I got to know through a friend in Kabul, for housing and food, and most important for opening many doors for me to meet local officials such as the head of the provincial council, Rasoul Khan and governor Munshi Majid, as well as many important ALP commanders, including Nurul Haq and Mullah Alam, both of whom I interviewed multiple times and who also feature prominently in the ALP story in Baghlan. For example, Mullah Alam's recollections of the conflict dynamics since the start of the US military intervention in late 2001, in which he participated, proved valuable when retracing the history of the local armed groups and their conflicts, and identifying the major commanders who would later emerge to lead arbaki and ALP militias in Baghlan. He was also instrumental in reconstructing the events that led to the armed clash between ALP and ANP in Bolakha-e-cement and the contestations and negotiations that ensued after the battle to work out a political settlement among the contending groups (see chapter 7). As someone who had a clear political agenda in shaping the discourse, his account of events, which was clearly influenced by his own interests, had to be validated through additional interviews to build a more plausible account. Therefore, to overcome the respondent's bias and accommodate the multiplicity of voices and meanings, I complemented his account with other accounts I had obtained from local politicians, elders who negotiated the dispute and local journalists who reported the incident.

Despite the overall deterioration in security in 2011, commonly measured in terms of the number of insurgent attacks in a given period, security in Baghlan and Kunduz had significantly improved since 2009. In the company of my journalist host, I was able to

travel freely throughout Pul-e-Khumri and the two other districts where the ALP had been established, Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dahana-e-Ghori. Although improved security allowed me to travel, gaining access to local officials was still difficult. In an environment of high uncertainty and low trust it was not easy for outsiders to navigate official channels and find access to the right people. In response to US-NATO night raids and air strikes that targeted Taliban commanders, they avoided direct confrontation with foreign forces and instead increasingly resorted to assassination of Afghan officials and pro-government elders, suicide bombing and the use of IEDs (improved explosive devices). Unless a trusted local source provided the initial introduction to local officials, they were reluctant to meet with outsiders. Hence, when my host and I went to interview Rasoul Khan, the powerful head of the provincial council and a former Jamiat commander, he was initially unwilling to grant me the interview. He asked my journalist friend whom he knew and could trust, whether I was a suicide bomber sent by the Taliban to kill him. I was a Pashtun from the south, so perhaps I fitted the bill of a typical suicide bomber. His concerns about his own safety were justified. In May 2013 a suicide bomber approached him while he was entering his office and blew himself up, instantly killing him. I frequently faced the same reluctance from other officials in Baghlan and Kunduz throughout my field research, worried that granting an interview to a stranger who was not a local journalist could compromise their security if I turned out to be a suicide bomber. This dynamic further increased my dependence on local journalists for access, so I had to plan my visits carefully to ensure my local contacts were in place and could get me interviews. Occasionally, I had to ask my Kabul-based contacts in the ministries to get me interviews with senior provincial officials like the governor or police chief.

My first few days were spent driving around Pul-e-Khumri with my journalist friend, basically sightseeing. He possessed a remarkable knowledge of the province's history and power dynamics. For hours on end I listened to him speak about the political and economic developments in Baghlan in the last four to five decades which was a great way of educating myself on my research context and gathering as much oral history of the province as I could since there were very few available written sources - my own knowledge of the context was very limited as well. He owned a local radio station where

news constantly flooded in from throughout the province; it was a great place to receive security and political updates. We visited ALP bases in Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori. It was important to get a feeling of the local security to determine where research was or was not possible and the lay of the land since many of the places I visited during my tour of the provincial capital were sites of some of the major events, like the ALP post in Dand-e-Shahabuddin where the battle of Shahabuddin took place and afterwards became the first site where the ALP was established by US forces. Similarly, visiting the cement factory and the worker's colony in Bolakha-e-cement helped me to reconstruct the events of 29 August that took place there. As it happened, when I arrived in Baghlan, it was only a few weeks after a major armed clash had occurred between the ALP and ANP in Bolakha-e-cement area. I began to reconstruct this particular event, which inevitably took me back to the early days of the US military intervention in 2001 as most of the actors involved in that incident had roots going back to that period, and in the case of Mullah Alam and the Andarabi commanders to the 1980s and 1990s. In retracing that history I also stumbled upon the post-2001 contestations over power, as many of the key actors involved in this violent episode had been involved in removing the Taliban from power in 2001 and subsequently engaged in internal power struggles - it was the Jamiat-linked Andarabi commanders who ended up dominating the provincial power structure, including the ANP. It also meant retracing the rise of the Taliban and arbaki militias in 2009, and eventually its transition to ALP in early 2011. On subsequent visits to Baghlan I stayed in a local village close to Dand-e-Shahabuddin, which offered greater flexibility in meeting with ALP commanders and recruits and occasionally US forces. I lived in the home of a former Najibullah-era militia commander who had abandoned that life; one of his sons was now the director of a local NGO. It would have been inconceivable to live in the village surrounded by ALP and the Taliban without security guarantees, which I had obtained through a mutual friend in Kabul. His unparalleled knowledge of the local armed groups and the security dynamics, as well the emergence and evolution of the ALP - which initially happened in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, a few villages down the valley - was very useful in reconstructing the events I describe in chapter 7.

Although I had decided to conduct field work in Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz, by the time I began the actual research I had not decided on specific research sites within each province, whether to cover one or more than one district. The dilemma resolved itself after I got around to gathering information about the processes and specific events in each location. The most useful approach seemed to suggest that I follow the emergence and the evolution of local militias organically - those sites where militias had first emerged such as Dand-e-Shahabuddin in Pul-e-Khumri became my primary research site in Baghlan. This allowed for both retracing the process and following it 'live' as it expanded to new locations – which as far as security and logistics permitted I explored in the course of my field research. Even though I followed the ALP process in all the districts of every one of the provinces I had selected for this research where the programme was implemented, I did not visit each and every one of the districts or ALP sites, primarily because of security considerations. Fieldwork was conducted in districts that were deemed secure enough to allow travel, either by myself, in the company of local journalists or researchers or provincial authorities, including Kunduz city, Khanabad and Chahardara in Kunduz; Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dahan-e-Ghori in Baghlan; and Maidanshahr, Nerkh, Jalrez and Sayedabad in Wardak. In addition provincial capitals were relatively more stable than most districts; these central locations provided a crucial point for the gathering of material on the ALP, which at the provincial level fell under the authority of the provincial chief of police. ALP recruits and commanders, as well as district authorities and local elders could be frequently found in the provincial capital or Kabul when called for meetings with visiting dignitaries or making representations on behalf of their constituencies to provincial authorities or the central government or to receive training and supplies. The provincial councils were also important source of information on the ALP - they were, at least in theory, responsible for vetting recruits and oversight over ALP forces.

Interacting with key informants, especially during official events in the provincial capital was a particularly useful way of gathering material in Wardak since travel to most districts outside the provincial capital Maidanshahr was not possible when I was researching local militias there in the winter/spring of 2011/12 and summer of 2012/13, except when I accompanied the governor or US officials to districts centers to attend

choreographed events attended by a select category of people. I have described one such a visit to the district centre of Sayedabad, on which I draw for ethnographic observations to build part of chapter 6. Each strategy presented its own set of methodological and ethical dilemmas that I address later in the chapter. Unlike Baghlan, Wardak was much more insecure. Although it was easier to get to Wardak, due to its location in the proximity of Kabul, travel within the province was restricted by security concerns even during the relatively quieter winter months. Whenever I visited Wardak, the first week-long stay was in December 2011, I stayed at the governor's compound. The governor was a friend and colleague from our shared past in the NGOs world. Like myself, the governor was from the south, he had been appointed to his post in 2008 amidst deteriorating security and had to quickly learn about the security and power dynamics in the province, the profile of major actors and the constant power struggles, which had made Wardak so unstable in the last few decades. The rise of the Taliban insurgency in the summer of 2008 so close to the national capital had caused alarm bells to ring in Kabul and Western capitals. Such anxieties over the fate of Kabul, and by extension that of the entire NATO intervention, eventually led to the deployment of US troops and the arming of local militias, beginning with AP3 in four insecure districts. In the last three to four years, the governor had developed considerable insights into the local conflict dynamics and the nature of the insurgency, as well as first hand knowledge of how the US-backed militia programme unfolded in Wardak. Being housed at the governor's compound meant I had constant access to him, and spent long nights discussing the old and new developments in Wardak and retracing the history of US involvement with local militias since he took office in 2008. I greatly benefited from his insights during my stay with him, and hopefully this is reflected in the quality of my research material on which I base the ALP narrative in chapter 6. In contrast to the other two provinces where I carried out this research, I had far greater access to the people who designed and implemented the AP3/ALP in Wardak - that is the reason why chapter 6 is focused on the role of US forces and the problematic legacy they left behind in the wake of widespread abuses against civilians in Wardak.

There were many advantages to staying with the governor. I was housed in a secure location, could travel around more than I could on my own and had easy access to

provincial and district government officials, ALP commanders and most important, US forces. I was invited to many public and private meetings between the governor, chief of police, head of secret service, their US counterparts and ALP commanders where problems related to the ALP were discussed and plans for reform and expansion of ALP to new sites were hammered out. These discussions occasionally turned tense as each side blamed the other for past mistakes, which also revealed the complex history of the AP3 and ALP programmes in Wardak. Some of these problems were already in the public domain but a lot of new facts emerged which were officially confirmed during these discussions. For example, the recruitment of AP3 and ALP fighters from other provinces which was officially denied came to light during a disarmament event in March 2012 in Maidanshahr that was organised to vet non-Wardaki recruits from the ALP (see chapter 6). Likewise, information about the dominant role that local commanders and powerbrokers rather than local elders had played in the process was denied by government officials and US commanders, but such claims were openly acknowledged during internal discussions to which I had access. It was also important to learn about the contested views, which had been suppressed during earlier debates about militias and the continued resistance from local elders and government officials, and sometime from former commanders even though in public they endorsed the ALP. I was able to interview many of these actors who frequently dropped by the governor's office or arranged to meet with me in Kabul. A number of provincial officials, district council members, prominent elders and local commanders lived in the same neighbourhood of Kabul where I lived, so access was not a major issue. In addition I was able to access official documents, minutes of meetings and visit sites and attend meetings which would ordinarily be off limit to me or otherwise difficult to access for reasons of security and logistics.

The problems of gathering data due to the restrictions imposed on attendance by official events could be overcome in other ways, as shown in the example of Sayedabad in chapter 6, where I show how a local journalist and a respected tribal elder pointedly criticised the conduct of local militias and challenged the governor's pro-militia discourse. These official events were sometime attended by former commanders like Mullah Loudspeaker (not his real name, only a popular title he had inherited during the

war years in the 1990s). He frequently spoke in official events and was openly critical of the government and foreign forces, even though he was a former AP3 commander. I would subsequently seek out such critical voices to gain background information on the processes I was researching, and crucially in reconstructing particular events and establishing what had taken place and what had been said – even though in recounting such events actors involved in the process tended to impose their own views and interpretations on events which required additional rounds of interviews, for purposes of triangulation. To address my own limitations while gathering background material from the governor or when accompanying government officials or foreign forces to field sites as well as to overcame the problem that official events/restrictions imposed on the availability of research data I triangulated the data by interviewing local journalists, district and provincial council members, NGO staff and local researchers who were better informed than most other people, simply because they happened to deal with or research and write about local militias. Because of their impact on local security and power relations, almost everyone had a view to share about local militias, which was great since there was never shortage of potential respondents.

In early 2012 I travelled to Kunduz for the first time. Like Baghlan, I had not been to Kunduz before and had no family or personal connections to the province. Inevitably the first problem to address was finding a safe place to stay and someone to guide me through the fieldwork, provide background information on cases and facilitate access to local officials and key informants. I obtained an introduction to a local journalist working for an Afghan wire agency who occasionally also reported for foreign media outlets. During the day I worked form his office, which he shared with other journalists and spent the night in his guesthouse in the outer portion of the family home in one of the new neighbourhoods of Kunduz city. I adopted the same method of acquiring background information on my research context as I had done in Baghlan. He proved very useful in explaining the recent political developments in Kunduz. Since the rise of the insurgency and arbaki militias in 2009 and the subsequent formation of local militias he had reported on these developments. He kept a voice and video archive of most of his interviews and reports and allowed me to listen to them. I gradually pieced together the history of the armed groups in Kunduz since 2001. I began to put faces to the names. One name that

was frequently heard in the material was that of Mir Alam, the former police chief and Jamiat commander in Khanabad, who featured prominently in the ALP account in Kunduz. One of the video recordings I viewed depicts a meeting that took place in Khanabad district in September 2011. Provincial authorities, including security officials from the army and police and the heads of provincial and district councils met with local arbaki commanders to encourage them to surrender heavy weapons, which they frequently used against each other in turf battles that frequently erupted in the district.

I used the video material and supplemented it with additional interviews with some of the officials and commanders who appeared in the recording to build part of chapter 8. Working from the office of my journalist host exposed me to many other local journalists, including US government-hired media contractors who were regularly brought into official ALP meetings, inauguration ceremonies and training sessions to produce TV and radio reports which were subsequently aired on local and national channels. This archive material further expanded the scope of research and allowed me to trace the emergence of local militias in Kunduz and use it to build case histories. They were particularly helpful in identifying which commanders were responsible for which ALP units and where. That was often the hardest thing, as I discovered in Baghlan and Kunduz, since local officials were reluctant to share information or give names of ALP commanders, citing official restrictions on sharing state information. Unlike Wardak I did not have the same level of access to government officials and documents. Hence the knowledge of local journalists in terms of identifying the different processes and actors involved in the ALP was of great value, without which it would have been difficult for an outsider like me who knew little about local commanders and powerbrokers to conduct interviews. The handful of local journalists I got to know in that office proved valuable when fixing interviews. As I mentioned in the case of Baghlan, local officials were wary of meeting outsiders for fear of them being suicide bombers - and if you were not a journalist they declined to speak to researchers, a concept they did not really understand. My meeting with the deputy governor of Kunduz, who provided valuable insights into the ALP dynamics from the very early stages of the process, would not have been possible without the help of local journalists who fixed the meeting. The deputy governor was part

of the US-Afghan government commission that was responsible for implementing the ALP programme in Kunduz, so he had first hand knowledge of the process.

Around this time I befriended another local journalist, slightly older than my host, who occasionally came to his office to report for local and international media. He was a part time journalist and studied at a local university and very engaged politically. This man, with whom I spent many hours discussing local politics and the insurgency in Kunduz, sometimes over delicious *qabili palau* cooked in cottonseed oil, proved to be a remarkable source of knowledge and information on the insurgency and the ALP in Kunduz. He had published some of the best reporting on the insurgency in Kunduz and had intimate knowledge of the conflict history, dating back to the 1980s. He had also written some of the earliest reports on local militias in Kunduz, which were very useful in retracing the emergence and expansion of the ALP. His vivid accounts of the armed clashes during 2009-2011 between the arbaki militias and the Taliban in central Kunduz and the adjoining districts, as well as the night raids conducted by US forces against Taliban commanders still resonate in my ears. By relying on these various sources and data instruments I was able to build up a 'mosaic of violence' and reveal the complicated legacies of violent conflict in Kunduz's recent history (Bakonyi and Bliesemann De Guevara 2009; Moore 2005). From then on he became my tutor, my guide and my fixer. For example, he was the first to mention Lal Bibi's case to me and provided the background information and then arranged for me to meet her family. I cover her story in great detail in chapter 8. During my second visit to Kunduz in the summer of 2012, a friend in Kabul, who had done extensive research for NGOs in the north, suggested I stay with a friend of his in Kunduz, a former army officer who now worked for a local NGO. This proved auspicious, as not only I had access to local journalists from a previous stay, I now found access, through this former army officer, to serving and retired police, army and secret service officers, as well as the provincial police chief and ALP commanders – and through them to US forces. The discussion I describe with commander Ala Nazar in chapter 8 was made possible because this former army officer arranged for me to visit his ALP post in central Kunduz and then convinced him to speak to me, despite clear instructions from US forces forbidding local commanders from speaking to journalists – a situation which played in my favour when I mentioned that I was a PhD student, not a

journalist. He was also very helpful in gathering background information on commander Ishaq Nizami, who was later convicted for his role in Lal Bibi's case, and many others I mention in chapter 8.

Security and ethical considerations

As an Afghan with years of experience working in the country I had a well-developed sense of the political and security dynamics as well as the cultural awareness to operate in a context like Afghanistan. The frequent invocation of 'Afghan solutions to Afghan problems' and claims of Western respect for Afghan values and traditions had an important bearing on my research into local militias. As it happened, the advent of US counterinsurgency, much the same way as in previous Western interventions, increased the demand for knowledge to map, understand and validate the 'real Afghanistan', which meant military commanders, foreign diplomats, aid workers, and journalists sought the 'local perspective' and preferred to work with local powerbrokers, including tribal elders and militia commanders. The valorisation of tradition translated into Western support for local defence forces, informal justice mechanisms, and sidestepping the central government and national institutions – reinforcing the notion of Afghanistan as an isolated, inward looking land of feuding tribes and timeless traditions – that of *yaghistan* (land of rebellion). The thirst for cultural knowledge led to a growing reliance on knowledge-brokers, Afghan research organisations, local informants and foreign academics. While this knowledge-power nexus sought to make visible the 'traditional' and the 'informal', it however rendered the underlying interests and hegemonic power relations invisible (Hakimi 2012, 7). This knowledge and information regime has a bearing on 'whose voices are heard, whose knowledge counts' (Goodhand 2000, 12). In chapter 6, I address this problematique both conceptually and methodologically. It is worth noting here that this information-and-knowledge regime tended to impose a certain outlook on events that had to be constantly peeled away in order to get at the actual relations of power that operated in specific contexts.

The challenges of doing research in conflict zones are many. This becomes even more problematic when researching the insurgency and local militias - as agents of coercion

they are a source of danger to both the researcher and the informants he/she engages with. The ethical and security dilemmas have a strong bearing on both the researcher and his/her informants - and by extension the research data. The importance of the researcher's own judgement/sensibility and his/her knowledge of the context has been recognised in addressing ethical considerations arsing from research in contested settings (Wood 2006). Researchers have a recognised responsibility for the safety and protection of their respondents – for this reason I have respected the wishes of respondents who wished to remain anonymous or asked me not to directly quote them. High-ranking officials whose names appeared in public documents such as media reports in connection with the ALP or who spoke in public events and meetings have not been anonymised since the information they shared and the positions they adopted had already entered the public domain. Others agreed before hand to be quoted, such as President Karzai and his national security advisor and countless other officials who spoke about the official version of events and commanders of US forces and ALP militias who helped in retracing the history of ALP and its previous incarnations. Local journalists were mentioned on the basis of their published material, but when I was given access to information that was not publicly available and requested not to mention their identities in connection to that information, I have applied the rules of confidentiality. I took care not to divulge personal or sensitive information, which was directly shared with me or came to my attention as part of my interaction with other actors, unless it had entered the public domain.

The processes I examined in chapter 6 gave me privileged access to a lot of sensitive information discussed during meetings between the governor and US forces, which I decided to omit from my account of the ALP in Wardak, either at the request of the governor or when it became evident that revealing it would have complicated relations between my respondents on different sides of the Afghan government-NATO divide. I resisted the temptation of offering opinions or discussing rumours concerning the political motives of my respondents when pressed by members of the US Special Forces. I equally resisted the temptation to identify potential partners for them to work with when expanding the programme to new areas or specify who among the local powerbrokers could or could not be trusted. The reason I was sometimes asked for this kind of information was mainly because most US commanders had a poor idea of who the real

powerbrokers were despite the large resources the military poured into the 'human terrain' programme to map the local power structures.

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, before interviews were conducted and data was requested, the subject of the research was clearly explained to potential informants. I made sure to differentiate academic research from research conducted by governments, think tanks, NGOs, the military and journalists. By clearly explaining the purpose of the research, I hoped to guard against biased, self-serving information given with the expectation of some gain, as is the case with NGO surveys conducted in connection with the delivery of assistance. In conflict zones, seeking information is inherently sensitive and can be a dangerous undertaking, especially if parties to the conflict perceive the information to be harmful to their interests or simply viewed as gathering 'intelligence' for one or the other side in the conflict. In an environment where foreign military forces, local armed groups, and insurgents operated in the same space, and where uncertainty was always high and trust low, it was important to know which group was in control of a particular area as well as the broader dynamics of conflict. It was therefore important to exercise proper judgement as to who could participate in the research, and what kind of information to be collected, from whom and where to collect it, and then how to ensure protection of data (coding, short hand, encryption, multiple storage devices). This again relates to the 'sensibility' of the researcher. Information in conflict zones are frequently politicised, manipulated and twisted to serve particular agendas. A conflict setting by its nature will impede access to some, which might mean that some voices are heard and others are not. Because of the political nature of the subject, respondents tended to influence the information they provided with their personal histories and ideological biases. Others supplied misleading information or withheld information altogether. One had to be sensitive to how these dynamics impacted the quality of data and the scope of research findings. To overcome such limitations, information obtained from respondents was verified by triangulating it with other sources to ensure that the research remained open to the multiplicity of voices and interpretations in order to build a plausible account of events (Long 1992, 200).

Chapter 4: Historical lineages of state power in Afghanistan

I. Introduction

This chapter explores the violent and non-linear history of Afghan state formation, which provides a foundation for the empirical findings of the thesis. Historically, state institutions emerged alongside and were deeply entangled with patrimonial networks and practices. Patrimonial orders ensured the dominance of elite groups through the preferential allocation of special privileges that resulted from the differential access to state institutions and valuable political and economic resources. As the state's institutional framework expanded the structure of elite privileges also changed, opening the way for those previously excluded from power to make their own claims on the allocation of resources and access to state institutions. Central to this process were social changes in the aftermath of popular mobilisation against foreign invasions in the nineteenth century that empowered new groups (*ulema* and tribal aristocracy), mass education in the mid-twentieth century giving rise to the emergence of *rentier* revolutionaries, and the decentralisation of the means of violence and the rise to power of mujahedin commanders and warlords during the war years - 1978 onward (Barfield 2010; B. R. Rubin 1991; Giustozzi 2009b).

In this chapter I examine the historical processes that shaped the sporadic institutionalisation of state power and changing notions of legitimacy in Afghanistan. It aims to provide the necessary contextual background to better understand today's transnational efforts to rebuild the Afghan state (chapter 5). The historical emergence of the Afghan state began with the rise of the conquest empire of Ahmad Shah Durrani in the mid-eighteenth century, following the decline of regional empires that had previously ruled over Afghanistan. The brief account detailing the emergence and subsequent decline of the Durrani Empire is followed by the examination of contests for power leading up to the consolidation of state power before and after the First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42). Particular attention is paid to Afghanistan's first colonial encounter and the transformative role of British colonialism in the modernisation of military and civilian bureaucracies and state centralisation. The next section looks at the violent centralisation

of power at the end of the nineteenth century under Abdul Rahman Khan, followed by Amanullah's efforts directed towards modernisation and strengthening state power in the context of an independent Afghanistan that no longer had access to external subsidies. The next four decades saw Afghanistan undergo some modest level of modernisation and state centralisation with increased reliance on international aid, in the context of Cold War rivalries between the US and Soviet Union and progressively declining domestic revenue. This period is of particular significance because of the emergence of modern political and military organisations and the roles they played in national politics and the ensuing war. I explore the power struggles between leftist and Islamist parties before the outbreak of the war in 1978, the Soviet invasion and its counterinsurgency/pacification strategy, the dynamics of the anti-Soviet resistance and mujahedin commander-networks and the political economy that emerged during the war years. In the concluding section I summarise the nature of the Afghan political economy and the state in the period preceding the US-led intervention in 2001.

II. The historical emergence of state rule

As explored in chapter 2, the rulers of pre-modern states acquired political legitimacy through wars of conquest, redistribution of plunder and protection of subject population (Barfield 2004, 263–64). Rulers were typically military leaders and the source of their royal power was victory in battle, defence of the realm against external aggression, redistribution of spoils of war to followers and provision of protection to subjects in exchange for rents in the form of taxation (Elias 1982, 2:8–22; Tilly 1985). This model of political order required military leaders to be constantly engaged in war-making, conquering new territory and acquiring economic resources needed to ensure a regular flow of patronage to followers. As long as the threat of external invasion or the promise of conquest of new territories persisted and rulers performed their function as military leaders this oldest form of patrimonial state sustained, and over time some became 'highly centralized patrimonial bureaucracies' (Elias 1983, 22). Centralisation of power by a ruler enabled access to resources in society, empowering some groups while disempowering others, a process that was bound to be disruptive and conflictual as

attested by the non-linear trajectory of state formation in Afghanistan (Cramer and Goodhand 2002, 898).

III. The conquest empire of Ahmad Shah Durrani

Prior to the establishment of Afghanistan in the eighteenth century as a regional empire in the tradition of its predecessors, pre-modern Afghanistan maintained fluid relations between the Mughal and Safavid empires involving competition and intermittent control over Kabul and Kandahar. Ahmad Shah Durrani's empire which emerged following the decline of Safavid, Mughal and Uzbek empires needs to be distinguished from the Afghan state that took shape in the nineteenth century in the context of Britain's global imperial project (S. M. Hanifi Forthcoming). Ahmad Shah, an Abdali Pashtun was a military leader[19] in the service of Persia's Qizilbash ruler, Nadir Shah Afshar. He took part in Nadir Shah's military campaign in northern India that culminated in the sacking of Delhi under Mughal control in 1739. After Nadir Shah's sudden death in 1747, that year Ahmad Shah established the Durrani Empire as a traditional 'conquest empire' (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1191). Afghan rulers viewed war which involved displacing rival ruling elites as 'an effective way to gain and retain power because victory provided legitimacy' (Barfield 2004, 265). Consequently, Ahmad Shah 'spent his entire career fighting campaigns to retain his most valuable territories' (ibid 2004, 271). Initially during his reign Ahmad Shah gained the loyalty of his Abdali clan through two measures. First, depending on their rank he bestowed on every Durrani elder 'an appropriate gift and stipend'. Second, he appointed most of the Abdali khans to the major offices of the state (Ghani 1982, 338). Since Durrani power was the mainstay of state power, Ahmad Shah sought to 'create a firm nexus between the clans, their khans, and the state'. To this end he appointed Durrani clan leaders and granted them economic privileges in the form of land grants, known as *tiyul* or *jagir* in exchange for military service, the right to farm the revenues of the districts and the military pay of the leaders (ibid 1982, 344–46). The total revenue of Ahmad Shah's reign (1747-72) has been estimated at 30 million rupees, one-

[19] Durrani rulers are typically presented as 'tribal leaders' of egalitarian decent groups ruling by consensus as *primus inter pares* as opposed to territorial or military leaders. See Dupree (1973), Rubin (1988).

third of it (10 million) went to 'half subdued princes' and of the remaining 20 million rupees, about half had been assigned to *tiyul* or *jagirs* 'granted on the condition of military service' (ibid 1982, 360–61). However, as a typical conquest empire, the state's major thrust was on territorial expansion both as means of extracting rents and preventing dissension at home, for which the ruler needed the cooperation of other Pashtun tribes. To that end, the 'recognition or creation of khans served both to give other clans a stake in the future of the state and to provide the state with the necessary manpower for its geographical expansion' (ibid 1982, 354–56). The Durrani khans as the main occupants of state positions as well as tribal chiefs of the other Pashtun clans were therefore the main beneficiaries of Ahmad Shah's military campaigns and territorial expansions.

The khans of the Durrani clans did not have a hereditary claim to state offices. From the beginning of his reign, Ahmad Shah retained the right to dismiss, appoint, and create new khans, state officials and tax farmers, including from among non-Durrani Pashtuns (ibid 1982, 363–65). These tribal contingents typically fought under their own khans so they provided the main link between the state and non-Durrani Pashtuns. Through the policy of naming and appointing tribal leaders and granting them privileges, the state's impact on the social structure of the tribes and the relations of power between different groups and lineages was significant. Although the Durrani elite were central to Ahmad Shah's support base, he also employed the Shia Qizilbash (slave soldiers and administrators) in the army and civil administration 'to balance the influence of the Durani forces and [who] played a very important role in the reign of his successors' (ibid 1982, 349). After the conquest of northern regions, members of non-Pashtun ethnic groups also joined the ranks of the Ghulaman Khasa (state slaves). Such divide-and-rule tactics 'allowed the ruler to maintain a degree of control over the situation by carefully balancing and manipulating the power of the various ethnic groups within the bureaucracy and the army' (ibid 1982, 352). Ahmad Shah's son, Timor Shah (1772-1793) continued to rely on the Qizilbash to increase his power at the expense of the Pashtun khans. In contrast to Rubin's (1988) and Hopkins' (2008) representation of the Durrani Empire as a 'tribal confederation' or tribal kingdom, Barfield characterised it as a 'centralized military regime' that depended for its frequent wars of conquest on paid mercenaries, especially the Qizilbash cavalry inherited from Nadir Shah and the subject tribes (mostly Durrani

Pashtun) who were in turn rewarded with jagirs (land grants) in exchange for military service (Barfield 2004, 270). Success in war depended on a powerful military and maintaining an army required a steady stream of revenue coming into the central treasury. The revenue that sustained Ahmad Shah's centralised military regime mostly came from conquered territories in northern India, from the provinces of Punjab, Kashmir, Multan and Sindh and to a lesser extent from northern and western parts of the empire (Ghani 1982, 360–62). Over three-fourths of the Durrani state's income reportedly came from those Indian provinces. The military consumed a large portion of these revenues. Over half of the Durrani state's total revenue had been assigned to '*jagirdars* (feudal chiefs) who furnished Ahmad Shah with the most effective part of his army and cavalry, which consisted of the tribal levies (*lashkar*)' (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1191–92). The highest ranking Durrani khans, called *sardars* commanded their followers in battle and acted as the civil magistrates of their areas (Ghani 1982, 346).

The Durrani Empire was thrown into prolonged crisis when it lost its most valuable Indian territories to the growing power of the Sikhs. The loss of these territories and the revenue they generated represented a major blow to the patrimonial basis of the state 'because they had provided the bulk of the resources that supported the army' and the payments that had bought the loyalty of khans of the Pashtun tribes (Barfield 2004, 271). Mobilising political legitimacy through conquest-plunder was no longer possible after the empire's demise. Cut off from the riches of India by the rise of Ranjit Singh in Punjab and the British colonial power in India, Afghan rulers were forced to 'internalise the processes of plunder' and seek new idioms of legitimacy, interchangeably relying on Islam, tribal genealogy or royal authority (Hopkins 2008, 9). The Afghan rulers' efforts to legitimate their rule by drawing upon the competing normative orders of 'tribe, Islam and royalism' exposed, according to Hopkins, the 'moral incoherence' of the Afghan political community, which was founded upon 'profound moral contradictions that have inhibited the country from forging a coherent civil society or sense of nationhood' (ibid 2008, 9 & 83). Such efforts repeatedly failed and 'one is therefore left with the story of an ineffectual and incomplete state, the legitimacy of which was never based on a social or political consensus. The state 'failed' because its roots in Afghan society were simply too shallow' (ibid 2008, 175). Hopkins argues that state failure should not be equated

with societal failure; alternative social formations (*qaum*, *khel*, religious *taraiqats*, and communities of itinerant traders) continued to exist to meet the needs of its members, which represented a viable alternative to state control.

Afghanistan's history of state formation shows that rulers deployed various legitimising idioms and discourses in order to assert or consolidate their power. At other times contestations between centralising rulers and competing centres of power led to fragmentation of authority which subsequently stimulated a new round of efforts to centralise power (Barfield 2010). These contestations cannot simply be characterised in terms of an enduring opposition between state and tribal power. As the example of Ahmad Shah demonstrates, a ruler may simultaneously rely upon conquest and the promise of plunder, jihad against infidels in the defence of Islam (Sikhs and Hindus in India for example) and his own tribal identity and royal authority to mobilise support from within and beyond his tribe, while simultaneously resorting to divide and rule tactics to manage internal competition over power. Like Ahmad Shah, Abdul Rahman Khan did not necessarily seek the 'destruction' of competing power centres[20] as much as a desire to break their autonomy and sub-ordinate them to the central government through accommodation and co-optation into state structures. For example, judges who were previously autonomous were turned into salaried bureaucrats subject to the dictates of the central ruler. He continued to maintain the power and privileges of the traditional elites (tribal chiefs and *ulema*) but only after subordinating them to central government, primarily through the re-negotiation of patron-client relations (Ghani 1978). Greater centralisation of the means of patronage allowed rulers to create elite monopolies and privileges, which they selectively redistributed to win political loyalties and expand networks of obedient clients and officials. Dependency on state resources and political relations based on patronage greatly expanded during Abdul Rahman Khan's reign, otherwise marked by institutionalised development of central power (Dorronsoro 2005).

[20] This social category typically included the royal lineage, Durrani *sardars*, khans of the Pashtun tribes and members of the religious establishment or *ulema*.

IV. Afghanistan's colonial encounter and its consequences

The colonial encounter and Afghanistan's position as a buffer state, with Afghan rulers mobilising geostrategic rents through this arrangement is a fundamental structural condition that shaped state formation in Afghanistan. It is important to appreciate the wider imperial landscape that in a sense created the 'conditions of possibility' for Afghan statebuilders. Between the time of Ahmad Shah Durrani's death (1772) and Abdul Rahman Khan's (1880-1901) rise to power, Afghanistan witnessed periods of crisis and attempts to re-establish central rule, which progressively took shape from 1826 onwards and continued after the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42). With the conquest of Herat in 1863, Dost Mohammad Khan (1826-39 and 1843-63) had more or less achieved the unification of the present territory of Afghanistan under central rule. The object of invading Afghanistan according to the British was 'to reorganize the country under one Chief' by placing its former ruler Shah Shuja on the throne of Kabul with the expectation that once united the country would serve as a barrier against Russian interference (Ghani 1982, 374). According to Hanifi (2011) initially economic considerations played an important role in the British decision to open up the Indus River to commercial traffic as part of a larger economic development plan to link Central Asia and Afghanistan to Indian goods and markets. The experimental phase of commercial exploration culminated in the invasion of the country. The two Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42 and 1878-80) served as the crucible of change in terms of consequences for the transformation of the traditional Afghan political and military organisation.

Barfield (2004) and Hanifi (2011) stressed the transformative impact of these wars, in contrast to the dominant narrative which argues that Afghanistan's colonially-imposed buffer status 'accounted for the persistent traditionalism of its society, which was transformed by neither the capitalist market nor a colonial state' (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1193). Previously, the traditional concept of political legitimacy in which competition for power ideally was restricted to a small ruling elite (royal lineage) began to erode after the two Anglo-Afghan wars as a result of popular military mobilisation against foreign invaders (using rural militias) allowing an ever wider circle of people to participate in national politics and subsequently contend for power. When the previously closed political system opened to competition for power from outside the royal household rulers

found it much harder to maintain their authority. The nineteenth century wars of national liberation against the British, much like the 1980s jihad against Soviet forces and their Afghan communist allies led to the disintegration of state structures, decentralisation of the means of violence, an increase in the number of contenders for power and the ever greater participation in national politics of the population groups that had previously been excluded from politics. These changes in the political and military organisation of Afghan society made the subsequent restoration of central authority harder (Barfield 2010, 5–7).

By the end of the nineteenth century major changes had occurred as a result of Afghanistan's colonial encounter. A largely unified state had emerged with a regular army in place of tribal levies and mercenaries and a centralised state bureaucracy had replaced formerly autonomous regional leaders and their feudal clients. The reforms that the British introduced during their first occupation (centralising the military, reducing subsidies to tribal chiefs and improving tax collection, mainly affecting non-Pashtun villagers north of Kabul) initially proved unpopular and may have played a part in growing dissatisfaction with the British. But in the long term they increased state power (Barfield 2010, 273–74). Most of these reforms, in particular efforts to build a disciplined and well-trained army were retained by Dost Mohammad Khan upon his restoration to power following the conclusion of the first Anglo-Afghan war in 1842.[21] The most important change the British introduced was 'to reduce the power of the Durrani notables by centralizing the military'. With the help of colonial money, 'horse and cavalry units formerly supplied by regional chiefs were replaced by those under the direct command of the central government' (ibid 2010, 273). The British decision to abolish this system 'greatly weakened' the influence of Durrani notables in government. It was from the supply of such units and the tax revenues they generated that the Durrani elite derived much of their power. Additionally, the sudden influx of colonial cash money into the local market increased inflation and adversely affected the fixed income from land on which these rural elites depended, further reducing their power. Under the Sadozai-

[21] Dost Mohammad Khan has been credited with laying-down 'the foundation of a 'regular' Afghan army ('*asakir-i nizamiya'*)', which marked a significant shift from 'the military system of the Sadozais, which relied in great part on tribal cavalry… and local militias' (Noelle 1997, 259).

Durrani system rulers awarded tax revenues in the form of *tiyul* or *jagir* to Durrani sardars in exchange for the supply of military units as and when needed. Dost Mohammad Khan had initially retained the military system of the Sadozai-Durranis (Noelle 1997, 262). Subsequently, he reduced reliance on tribal militias when the first standing army was created (Kakar 1979, 95). His successor, Sher Ali (1863-79) continued to modernise the army and during his reign 'created a larger and better army than that organised by his father… composed of infantry and cavalry' (ibid 1979). However, efforts to create and maintain a standing army were repeatedly frustrated due to the disintegration of the army during the two Anglo-Afghan wars. Crucially, 'the military power of Afghanistan had always rested more on the strength of irregulars (*sipah-i-ghair-i-munazzam*) than on the regular army' (ibid 1979, 109).[22] The Afghans expelled the British twice by employing rural militias in popular rebellions over which the dynastic elite had no control (Barfield 2010, 5).

The colonial encounter had set the stage for subsequent political and military developments toward greater centralisation of governmental power. The modernisation of the army during the first British occupation of Afghanistan and the provision of military aid to Dost Mohammad Khan between 1856 and 1858, including military equipment and 2.6 million British rupees were instrumental in the unification of the country, notably his conquest of Herat in 1863 (Ghani 1982, 380). Ghani also provides a rare glimpse into the impact of British colonial policies aimed at strengthening the institutions of the Afghan state prior to the second Anglo-Afghan war, which alongside non-intervention was until then official British policy towards Afghanistan. After the civil war of 1863-68, the British provided military equipment and 2.4 million rupees in cash (and from 1873 onwards 1.2 million rupees in annual cash subsidy) to Amir Sher Ali, the new ruler of the country. Ghani concluded that 'the money and the means of destruction were instrumental in the creation of a large standing army and the re-conquest of the country by the state' (ibid 1982, 381). Sher Ali's army also played a key role in defeating British forces and forcing their withdrawal. In 1880, the British appointed Abdul Rahman Khan

[22] Kakar reminds us that 'it was the irregulars that inflicted several losses on their British adversaries in all their wars' (Kakar 1979, 109).

as Afghanistan's new ruler. During a 21-year rule he left a powerful legacy in reshaping Afghanistan's system of governance.

V. Centralisation of power under the 'iron' Amir and his successors

Depending on context, rulers of states have had different institutional instruments at their disposal in managing domestic competition over power and resources and centralising authority. They include, among others, the use or threat of violence, divide-and-rule tactics and brokerage and patronage-based relations. From the end of the nineteenth century, Afghan rulers pursued the development of state institutions side by side with the maintenance of patrimonial practices (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1194; Dorronsoro 2005, 24). In neo-patrimonial states the dominance of ruling elites was ensured by limiting access to emerging institutions and maintaining existing monopolies and privileges that were gradually opened up to accommodate new elite groups, notably the educated class from whose ranks the twentieth centuries' 'rentier revolutionaries' (Islamists and communists) sprung up (Dorronsoro 2005, 27).[23]

Abdul Rahman Khan (1880-1901) more than any other Afghan ruler excelled in the ways of combining modern institutions with patrimonial practices.[24] The domestic consolidation of the state under Abdul Rahman Khan involved three key aspects: successfully defeating other challengers from within the royal clan with their own claim to the Afghan throne, the conquest of new territory and subjugation of people who had remained independent of the authority of the Afghan ruler, and the development of

[23] Following Barfield's logic of changing notion of political legitimacy, the history of institutional development in Afghanistan in the twentieth century is summarised as follows: the gradual opening up of the political system to increased elite competition was by the 1960s and 70s accompanied by a significant decline in foreign aid and domestic revenues which plunged the state's patrimonial system in crisis, eventually paving the way for the communist revolution and takeover of power in 1978 (B. R. Rubin 1988). Previously, the political system allowed limited competition for state power, essentially restricted to a small circle of the Durrani royal clan. Under this 'closed' political system rulers found it easier to maintain their authority.

[24] For political and economic developments during this period see Hanifi (2011).

bureaucratic state structures, notably a powerful standing army[25] and civil bureaucracy (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1194). Abdul Rahman Khan's centralising policies included 'the forceful conquest of all regions that hitherto enjoyed a degree of autonomy, the imposition of taxes on land-owners hitherto exempted or unwilling to pay, the enforcement of conscription on all tribal groups, and most important of all, the complete suppression of local mechanisms for the settlement of disputes and their replacement with Shari'a courts' (Ghani 1978, 272). It is not surprising to note that his modern army was 'constantly employed in the reconquest of every part of the country, in some instances several times over' (Ghani 1982, 383). This coercive process of consolidating central power gave rise to numerous disturbances and rebellions. During his twenty-one year reign, Abdul Rahman Khan extended central government power 'to the remotest corners of the country' and left behind a state 'that had never been so centralized' (Ghani 1978, 271). Despite its designated status as a politically and economically isolated colonial outpost between Central Asia and India, Afghanistan during the nineteenth century did not remain immune from the effects of British colonialism. During this period, according to Hanifi, Afghanistan consolidated as a European colonial construct in political, economic and intellectual terms (S. M. Hanifi 2011, preface). The success of Abdul Rahman Khan's centralising policies owed a great deal to the regular inflow of British subsidies and arms (1.2 million rupees during the first decade and 1.8 million rupees during his second decade in power), which helped his quest to pacify and unify Afghanistan.

Next to reliance on his army and police apparatus, non-coercive means of legitimating power were equally important. Like some of his predecessors, Abdul Rahman Khan undertook to both repress opposition to his rule and to reintegrate his vanquished opponents within the structures of the state making them dependent on state patronage (Ghani 1982, 390). Previously, Dost Mohammad Khan had embarked on a campaign of re-conquest of northern Afghanistan. By 1859 he had established Kabul's rule in the

[25] To fight his numerous wars Abdul Rahman Khan needed soldiers. Expenditure on armed forces, regular and irregular units estimated at 79,000 in mid-1880s was over 58 per cent of the total expenditure of the state, which included a 1.2 million rupee subsidy from the British (Ghani 1982, 392).

northern regions and followed the administrative practice of retaining local Uzbek *amirs* as clients and potentates of the central government in a system of indirect rule, until the region was subjected to the centralising policies of Abdul Rahman Khan (Noelle 1997, 88 & 97). The northern region of Afghan Turkistan came into Abdul Rahman Khan's possession around 1888. His military annexation and subsequent centralising policies resulted in the large-scale elimination or displacement of former Uzbek ruling elites, which paved the way for the establishment of central rule in Afghan Turkistan. Even though the former rulers of the region had been killed or exiled, the Durrani ruler subsequently appointed a new leadership to act as intermediaries between Kabul and the northern provinces. He relied upon the newly appointed local middlemen to provide assistance to the new authorities in 'the completion of even the most rudimentary administrative tasks, such as collection of taxes and recruiting soldiers' (Wilde 2013, 61; Noelle 1997, 106). In this mutually reciprocal system 'the relationship between central and rural areas was mediated by local elites: well-to-do landlords, religious dignitaries and influential families' (Wilde 2013, 59). This form of power which 'largely rested on bonds of patronage and clientele networks' remained in place until the outbreak of conflict in 1978 (Barfield 2013; Centlivres-Demont and Centlivres 2013).

Although Abdul Rahman Khan liquidated or exiled many local khans during his long reign, he did not intend to eliminate the khans as a class, on whom he depended for the administration of local areas. The main 'goal was to deprive them of autonomous political power and completely subdue them to the central government', as he did with *ulema* as a class. By depriving them of their autonomous sources of power he made them dependent on the state and by manipulating the flow of resources, paying them cash stipends instead of land grants, he maintained state control over them. In some cases he appointed khans where they did not exist and paid them to maintain retainers. By controlling the financial basis of the khans' power, the *amir* 'was able to compel them to act according to his wishes' (Ghani 1982, 400–402). His policy with regard to the khans was very selective: imprisoning or taking hostage the most powerful khans, employing the less influential in state administration, mostly in the army and leaving men without following to their own devices. What is important to stress here is that despite his centralising policies and removing autonomous sources of power, he enlarged the state's

patrimonial dealings with those whose autonomy had been taken away by making them dependant on the state. At issue were relations of interdependency between the ruler and local powerbrokers, which over time yielded greater centralisation of power.

Abdul Rahman Khan also instrumentalised Islam in support of his centralising policies. The utilitarian use of religion for strengthening the secular authority of the government is evident in his use of the concept of *jihad* (holy war). By declaring himself a divinely appointed ruler (God's regent on earth), Abdul Rahman Khan claimed that 'as he was waging *jehad* by strengthening the defences of Afghanistan against non-Muslim powers, it was the duty of all Muslims in the territory of Afghanistan to support and pay taxes to him' (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1194).[26] Ghani noted that during Dost Mohammad Khan's second reign (1843-1863), which corresponded with the consolidation through military and political manoeuvres of all the regions of the present territory of Afghanistan under his control, there was a subtle but important 'shift in the legitimation of relations of domination' (Ghani 1982, 377). Ideally, the Pashtun tribes regulated their social relations through *Pashtunwali*, which did not make any reference to 'paying taxes and following kings'. Dost Mohammad Khan (and later Abdul Rahman Khan) 'justified his notion of monarchy by reverting to Islam' and in so doing placed the interest of the state (and the ruler as defender of the faithful) above that of Pashtun tribes, requiring them to pay taxes and obey the ruler (ibid 1982, 377). Olesen (1995) argued that religion and politics are deeply interwoven in Afghanistan's statebuilding history. Islam served as a useful legitimating tool for the centralisation of power. The Islamic concept of *umma* (the community of believers) that transcended the parochial identities of tribe and ethnicity common among a heterogeneous population played a key role in this process. It allowed for sanctioning of absolute rule, the king as a divine authority, which neutralised the egalitarian claims of *Pashtunwali*, the social code of conduct among the Pashtun tribes. In Islamic polities the ultimate source of political legitimacy is God. In the tribal model of the state, political legitimacy derived from tribal genealogy of the ruler and

[26] By universalising taxation Abdul Rahman Khan dismantled the policy of his predecessors who had recognised the special status of some of the Pashtun tribes by exempting them from taxation but had imposed different levels of tax on different tribes, ethnic groups, and provinces. Since tax-farming continued to be the main method of collecting revenue, and to avoid abuse of office, the *amir* appointed tax-farmers to short terms of office and dismissed them frequently.

secondarily sanctioned by the religious authority of the *ulema*, as in the crowning of Ahmad Shah Abdali by a *Sufi* religious dignitary in 1747. Abdul Rahman Khan instead relied on the 'Pious Sultan' theory to challenge and substitute the tribal model of authority and succeeded in curtailing the power of the tribal aristocracy vis-à-vis the state.

The establishment of official sharia courts in all the provinces 'operating by procedures laid down by the state' were meant to not only increase the Islamic legitimacy of the regime, they were also a means of centralising state power (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1194). Centralisation of justice involved curbing the influence of the religious establishment and breaking the power of the local tribes. In the nineteenth century both groups 'enjoyed extensive economic and moral power'. It is estimated that in the year 1879 'one third of the revenue of each province was devoted to the upkeep of the religious establishment and another third consisted of the tax exemptions of the tribal aristocracy' (Ghani 1978, 271). Although he curtailed the economic independence and sovereign privileges of these elite groups he did not intend their destruction. Abdul Rahman Khan's 'policies were directed at reshaping both groups [tribal aristocracy and religious establishment] in such a way that their subordination to the central government and their allegiance to his person were ensured' (ibid 1978, 271). Reducing the power of the clergy was achieved by the state's take-over of jurisdiction over criminal cases and family law under the control of the *ulema*. Historically, the *ulema* as state appointed judges (qazis) had played a key role in the administration of justice in towns, while in rural areas the *ulema* adjudicated cases more or less autonomously. At the end of the nineteenth century, Abdul Rahman Khan appointed *ulema* as justice officials as part of a nationally unified justice system. The *ulema's* position as salaried bureaucrats subject to the state's appointment and supervision procedures weakened their power and made them dependent on the ruler's good will to retain their office.[27] However, in co-opting the *ulema* into the state, the ruler partly strengthened them (within the state) as a group, even though he attempted to

[27] The *ulema* had played an important role in organising popular resistance against the British invasion of Afghanistan during the nineteenth century. Subsequently they emerged as powerful political actors. Starting with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, the *ulema* emerged as the legitimizers of kingly rule, a position which further enhanced their power in relation to both aspirants and holders of royal power (Nawid 1999, 188; Dorronsoro 2005, 33).

reduce their autonomy (outside the state) (Olesen 1995). The enforcement of sharia law 'represented a modernizing and centralist impulse in a context where customary tribal law prevailed' (Kandiyoti 2007, 173). In the long run the sharia courts staffed by paid justice officials allowed for the greater encompassment of rural areas and the expansion of state power to the periphery and the subordination of the clergy to the central government (Ghani 1978). For example, 'the centralization and bureaucratization of the *shar'ia* gave the state a new role as arbitrator and opened the way to the enforcement of women's claims as disputants in Islamic *qadi* courts' (Kandiyoti 2007, 173).

Abdul Rahman Khan's ruling practices were justified in religious rather than tribal terms; he invoked Sharia rather than *Pashtunwali,* which he used to centralise power and undermine the position of the tribal aristocracy by suppressing customary justice. From this perspective, the notion of Pashtun domination and tribalism attributed to Durrani rulers is questionable (S. M. Hanifi Forthcoming). As a result of these centralising policies, over time a subordinate governing class comprising members of the royal lineage, tribal aristocracy, local notables and the clergy emerged on the basis of patrimonial ties to the ruler (which he regularly manipulated to ensure political loyalties) to meet the staffing needs of the newly centralised civilian and military bureaucracies and serve as clients of the ruler in a system of indirect rule in the provinces. The training and recruitment of *gholam-i shah* (the king's slaves)[28] and *pishkhedmat*, an equivalent of the *mamluk* system in the Ottoman Empire 'constituted the backbone of the royal administration' (Dorronsoro 2005, 26). They were the sons of local notables kept by the *amir* as sureties for the loyalty of their families or were brought to Kabul as slaves taken during military campaigns of newly conquered regions. Even though Abdul Rahman Khan introduced conscription, he continued to rely on village elders and tribal leaders for military recruitment and tax farming.

Popular uprisings and opposition to state rule has always involved issues of centralisation of power and the control of vital resources. The role of money and access to regular rents proved crucial in the centralisation of power in the nineteenth century. The British

[28] Ghani mentioned ghulam-bachas (slave boys) attending the *amir's* court. Many of them subsequently became prominent officials of the state (Ghani 1982, 405).

subsidies starting with Dost Mohammad Khan, which continued after Abdul Rahman Khan took over power (estimated at 1.8 million rupees after 1893 when he acceded to the Durand Line separating Afghanistan from British India) allowed Afghan rulers to lessen reliance on tribal *sardars* because they had the cash to build centralised armies. Previous Afghan rulers had to rely on the tribal aristocracy for military service in exchange for granting them *tiyul* and *jagirs* which led to 'feudalisation' (chapter 2). But money changed this pattern of production and domination. With partial monetisation of the economy, the previous tendency of fragmentation and decentralisation of power was replaced by greater dependence of local rulers on the central ruler. From the establishment of the Durrani dynasty in 1747, particular groups of people have enjoyed differential access to economic privileges, which when threatened by the state forced these elite groups into alliance against it. Conflicts between central rulers and tribal and religious power centres were usually linked to contestations over access to state patronage and control of economic privileges, while the discourse of Islam and tribal autonomy were instrumental in organising opposition to the state. As Ghani noted 'in most cases, alliances formed among members of the religious stratum, khans, landowners, and the rest of the population, actually challenging the authority of the state through armed uprising, can be directly traced to the imposition of these policies', referring to the imposition of new taxes and curtailing the economic privileges of the religious establishment, tribal aristocracy and state officials (Ghani 1982, 394–96).

Ghilzai Pashtun and Hazara khans who led many revolts during this period received the harshest punishment, including forcible removal to other parts of the country and the killing, imprisonment and exiling of their leaders. As with vanquished Pashtun khans, the *amir* chose to subordinate the khans of Hazaras to the central government and restored their privileges after accepting his authority rather than eliminating them as a class (ibid 1982, 405). The brutal military conquest of Hazarajat, the central region where Hazaras are a dominant group, was in fact preceded by more subtle methods. During his first decade in power, the *amir* attempted to gradually extend his government authority to the region through the manipulation of factionalism among the Hazara khans, who remained bitterly divided, centring his efforts on playing one khan against another, generally supporting the weaker khans against the stronger ones, to strengthen his own position in

local politics. When he had sufficiently weakened the Hazara khans, in 1891 he was finally in a position to militarily conquer all of the central region. His repressive policies soon led to a general uprising of the local population led by their khans and between 1891 and 1893 a brutal war raged on in the central region, which ended with the full integration of this region into the Durrani Kingdom (Ibrahimi 2009, 4–5).

The political relations between tribe and state, viewed from a long-term perspective, can be generally characterised as one of intermittent collaboration and conflict rather than a perpetual thug-of-war between tribal groups and the central government. Ghani has demonstrated that from the time of Safavid and Mughal empires in the region, Afghan tribal lineages were essentially the product of state policies as opposed to some primordial social form pre-dating states. Abdul Rahman Khan's success in 'restructuring the relations of domination in the country' was evident from the way power peacefully transferred from him to his eldest son without any armed opposition. In his two decades of repressive rule, the *amir* 'had successfully replaced the old mode of domination with a new one where political power resided in the institutions of a centralized state' (Ghani 1982, 409). As a whole, while politically the country had been centralised, external economic forces based on competition between Russia and Britain 'were pulling the various regions of the country away from each other' (ibid 1982, 413–14). Economically the country had become decentralised and fragmented. While many changes had occurred in the relations of domination (political centralisation mainly due to British subsidies to the state), but in the sphere of economic production the dominant pattern of exchange had not changed. In summary, 'Abdur Rahman had managed to achieve an unprecedented degree of political centralization. Yet, the economic integration of the country had not been reached' (ibid 1982). The challenge remained how to realign political and economic spheres of production and domination.

VI. Kingship, kinship and revolution: the turbulent twentieth century

The reign of Abdul Rahman Khan's son, Habibullah Khan (1901-19) was a time of significant political and economic transformation. It coincided with the emergence of nationalist (modernist) and pan-Islamist movements in the Muslim world, from Persia

and the Middle East to India and North Africa, demanding constitutional reforms and an end to colonial occupation of Muslim lands. In Afghanistan this period was characterised by the demands for constitutional reform and independence from British control, both of which were achieved during the reign of Habibullah's son, Amanullah Khan (1919-29) (Barfield 2010, 12). This period marked the beginning of modern ideological struggles between modernists and the religious establishment led by the *ulema*. The political divisions that would eventually tear Afghanistan apart later in the twentieth century had their ideological roots in the transformative changes that had been introduced in this period, marking the beginning of the country's opening up to the outside world and the end of Abdul Rahman Khan's isolationist policies (ibid 2010, 176).

Habibullah Khan's reconciliatory policies allowed the rival Mohammadzai lineages such as the Musahiban brothers to return to the country from exile. Intellectuals like Mahmud Tarzi and members of influential Sufi movements (the Mujaddidi and Gailani families) were also allowed to return. These exile groups 'had an enormous impact on Afghan politics because they brought new ideas, both secular and religious, into a country that had long been cut off from the outside world' (ibid 2010, 175). Domestically a class of intellectuals, including members of the royal lineage had emerged, mostly trained for state service in new state schools and foreign countries (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1195). During the course of the twentieth century the development of state institutions was accompanied by a gradual enlargement in the size of the governing class which had progressively become urban and Kabuli (Dorronsoro 2005, 31). The Persian-speaking bureaucrats, dating back to the time of Ahmad Shah and his son Timor Shah occupied prominent positions in the state administration. The primary element of the governing class was the Mohammadzai royal clan.[29] These young intellectual and state officials grouped around Tarzi and were known as Young Afghans. The future monarch, Amanullah Khan was a member of the Young Afghans. While the Young Afghans and the reformist *ulema* later appeared as incompatible, in the beginning of the twentieth century both groups had

[29] The Mohammadzai were members of Abdul Rahman Khan's own royal lineage. They were the primary element of the governing class from 1880 to 1978. In an 1892 edict, the *amir* formalised their privileged role in the state and 'superior' status to the Ghilzai and Durrani clans by designating them as 'sharik-i-daulat' (partner of the state) and appointed them to privileged positions in the bureaucracy and the armed forces (Dorronsoro 2005, 31).

much in common in their opposition to British colonialism and the need for domestic political reform. They nonetheless differed in their approach to reforms: nationalist modernisers in the Young Afghans championed modernisation by adopting cultural and economic innovations from the West in the cause of anti-colonial struggle for independence. The *ulema* on the other hand promoted the cause of Muslim revivalism, unity and resistance to colonial domination by means of jihad (Barfield 2010, 176).

Habibullah Khan inherited power from his father, who was a loyal client of the British for over two decades without a succession struggle. His period of rule was marked for the most part by internal stability. From Dost Mohammad Khan through to Abdul Rahman Khan to Habibullah Khan and his son Amanullah Khan royal authority was seen to be emanating from the divine authority of God and sanctioned by the *ulema* (Dorronsoro 2005, 35). Yet, Afghanistan under Habibullah Khan remained under the control of the British colonial regime in India, which considering the mood of the times became a rallying cry and a marker of unity for his political opponents. Initially, Habibullah allowed both groups to flourish in a relatively open environment, but changed course when calls for constitutionalism to limit the power of the monarchy and independence from the British brought them closer together in opposition to his rule (Nawid 1999). The call for jihad against the British, which Habibullah Khan had initially supported but later suppressed, and the declaration of Afghan neutrality in the First World War alienated many of his supporters among the two movements and deprived his rule of the Islamic legitimacy on which his predecessors had based their power.[30] Habibullah Khan was assassinated during a hunting trip in eastern Afghanistan, paving the way for the rise of the reformist king, Amanullah Khan. The new monarch successfully drew upon these reformist sentiments and his declaration of jihad in 1919, which after a brief war culminated in Afghanistan's independence from the British, to further increase his initial popularity among both the nationalists and liberal *ulema*. Although British sources at the time described Amanullah Khan's relationship with the religious establishment as distant and often tense his earlier years before and after ascendance to power were marked by

[30] The Islamic basis of royal power underwent even more dramatic changes during Amanullah Khan's decade-long reign when he 'abandoned the principle of the divine legitimacy of royal authority in favour of a constitutional and nationalist model' (Dorronsoro 2005, 35).

good personal relations with eminent members of the country's religious elite (ibid 1999). These initial ties were further strengthened when the king joined forces with the *ulema* and the nationalists in the struggle for independence against the British, signifying a convergence of interests between the monarchy and social forces in society. From his newly attained position as defender of nation and religion, he launched a number of ambitious political, social and economic reforms, including professionalising the armed forces. During his reign Afghanistan passed its first constitution (1921). Independence from Britain, however, had cost him the loss of British subsidies which had played such a key role in ensuring political stability since the time of Abdul Rahman Khan's rise to power in 1880.

To finance his ambitious modernisation agenda, Amanullah Khan was forced to build a domestic resource base by introducing administrative reforms, including cutting back on allowances provided to the religious establishment and tribal leaders and rationalising the system of taxation, notably raising new taxes from agriculture to be paid in cash. In 1926 taxes on land and livestock constituted 62.5 per cent of the state's domestic revenue, most of it paid by the tribal chiefs and the landed gentry. To reform the army, Amanullah Khan introduced conscription, eliminating the role of village elders in the supply of coercive power, which was apparently a major factor in setting off the 1924 rebellion by the Mangal tribes in Khost. Short of funds, he tried to create a small and more efficient modern force, reduced cash pay and introduced non-cash benefits such as shelter and food, measures, which largely resulted in a demoralised army that failed to effectively respond to the 1928 rebellion (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1198). His reforms had alienated key elements of the Afghan society and struck at the power of the religious establishment, tribal leaders and members of the armed forces. When the border tribes in the east revolted against proposals to curb smuggling and increase toll collection, the *ulema* gave the tribal revolt Islamic sanction, declaring the king an infidel and when Tajiks north of Kabul, hard hit by new taxes on agriculture and livestock joined the revolt the demoralised and poorly resourced army failed to curb the uprisings. The discontinuance of tribal allowances and the abolition of the role of tribal leaders and Durrani *sardars* in state administration had alienated them from the monarchy. Amanullah Khan lost all

hopes of retaining power once the army and the tribal aristocracy abandoned him and was forced to relinquish power.

After an interlude of nine months during which time a Tajik rebel, Habibullah Kalakani (frequently given the derogatory appellation Bach-e-Saqao - son of water carrier) had sized power, Nader Khan, a *sardar* of the Musahiban family[31] captured Kabul with the help of the frontier tribes, mostly Waziri tribesmen from the British side of the border. These were the same eastern Pashtun tribes he had mobilised against the British during the brief war of independence in 1919. In the absence of pay, the tribesmen looted the city of Kabul and returned home 'loaded with loot' (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1199; Barfield 2010, 195). After Nadir Shah had been elected by a *loya jirga* dominated by the tribes, the legitimacy of the state increasingly rested on (Pashtun) nationalism rather than on royal authority sanctioned by Islam, as had been the case previously (Dorronsoro 2005, 38).[32] Having come to power with the help of a tribal *lashkar* and the religious establishment that provided the tribal revolt religious sanction, Nadir Shah[33] granted significant concessions to the *ulema* and tribal chiefs, including high profile positions in the government and reversed many of his predecessor's radical reforms. This was a conservative political settlement, which sought to maintain stability but arguably at the cost of modernisation and transforming socio-economic relations. He forged closer ties with prominent religious and tribal leaders and softened government policies regarding taxation, conscription, education and family law. The incorporation of *ulema* in the highest ranks of the bureaucracy after 1929 increased their political weight in domestic politics. The clergy gained additional influence in the government through the *Jamiat-al Ulema* (society of the *ulema*) with the power to review laws and government policies for conformity with Islam (Olesen 1995, 184; Dorronsoro 2005, 35). The influence of *ulema* gradually diminished in the 1950s under Daud Khan's premiership (1953-63) and by the

[31] The Musahiban family ruled Afghanistan from 1929 to 1978.
[32] The 1930s and 40s witnessed the rise of Pashtun nationalism, including attempts to impose Pashto as a national language. Such plans were later abandoned, but the government continued to promote Pashto alongside Dari as an official language (Dorronsoro 2005, 39; B. R. Rubin 1995, 66).
[33] In 1826 Dost Mohammad Khan, a Barakzai *sardar* dropped the title of shah in favour of *amir* because the former was associated with the Sadozai dynasty from which he wanted to distance himself. A century later, Nadir Khan dropped the title of *amir* and adopted that of shah to distance himself from Amanullah Khan's rule and legitimate the change of dynasty by aligning himself closer to the founder of the Durrani state, Ahmad Shah Durrani.

early 1960s had significantly declined (Dorronsoro 2005, 36). By the mid-1970s the government of President Daud Khan easily suppressed the Islamist rebellion in the countryside (Barfield 2010, 199).

Having learned the lessons of history the hard way through the example of Amanullah Khan, the Musahiban brothers pursued a gradual process of change as opposed to rapid, state-imposed modernisation. A conservative ruling agenda entailed maintaining the government's autonomy from the provinces and the traditional sources of revenue such as taxation from agriculture and livestock by seeking alternative means of sustaining the regime in power without confronting tribal chiefs. As a result, while the Musahiban rulers compromised with the traditional forces such as the *ulema* and the tribal leaders that had brought them to power, they forged closer links with the international state system and global markets, enabling them to develop a state-dominated export sector which they heavily taxed. With trade customs as the new source of government revenue, the Musahiban rulers gradually reduced the potential for conflictual interactions with and fiscal dependence on the 'peasant-tribal society', a social category which had played an important role in the rebellions that eventually succeeded in toppling Amanullah Khan's government (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1200). As a result, big landowners and tribal khans who had previously paid the direct taxes on agriculture and livestock found themselves financially unburdened by the new policies. They had been the main source of government revenue from the time of Abdul Rahman Khan (1880) to the end of Amanullah Khan's reign (1928). The 1931 constitution provided for a parliament and representation of tribal khans who used their official position to reduce the state's demands for taxation and conscription. As noted above, taxes from livestock and agriculture had constituted 62.5% of domestic revenue in 1926. Under the Musahiban rule they continually declined: in 1952-3 they had fallen to 18.1%, and by 1958 had further fallen to about 7%, while in the 1970s they only amounted to less than 2% of state revenue (ibid 1988, 1200–1201).

To compensate for the fall in domestic revenue from agriculture the Musahiban rulers turned to foreign trade and customs revenue, which in 1953 amounted to about 40% of the state's total revenue. Even though by the 1960s foreign trade constituted 80% of all taxes, the export based enclave economy was too small to support a major statebuilding

effort (B. R. Rubin 1995, 60 & 65). The difficulty of mobilising sufficient internal resources prompted Afghan rulers to seek external resources in the form of foreign aid, which given Afghanistan's geostrategic position in the Cold War poured into the country, to help them accumulate capital and finance the modernisation of the country. From 1957 onward foreign aid mainly from the Soviet Union constituted a much larger source of revenue for the Afghan state.[34] Rubin estimated that from 1956 to 1973 foreign aid both from the Soviet Union and the United States accounted for 80% of the Afghan state's investment and development expenditure (ibid 1995, 65). With the signing of the 1955 Soviet-Afghan cooperation agreement, which provided for the training of officers and military supplies Afghanistan effectively became a client of the Soviet Union (Dorronsoro 2005, 29) and assumed its much discussed character as a 'rentier state' (B. R. Rubin 1995, 65; Saikal 2004, 117). From 1958-68 and again in the 1970s Afghanistan's weak rentier state financed over 40% of its expenditure from revenues obtained form abroad. The growing reliance on external aid, as noted by Rubin, resulted in the emergence of a nation-state enclave, which meant that the state did not need to penetrate society to govern it or confront the khans as Abdul Rahman Khan or Amanullah had or mobilise local power holders for conquest as Ahmad Shah Abdali had. Instead, the Afghan state pursued patrimonial politics and encapsulated rather than confront traditional sources of power - the khan and *ulema* were given special privileges, symbolic roles and considerable autonomy (B. R. Rubin 1995, 62–73). The ruling elite acted as 'ethnically stratified hierarchy of intermediaries between foreign powers providing the resources and the groups receiving the largess of patronage' (ibid 1995, 20).

State imposed modernisation in the 1950s signalled a return to an 'expansionist' model of the state. During the premiership of Daud Khan (1953-63), the government reduced the power of tribal chiefs and the *ulema* and modernised the armed forces, for example widening its recruitment base to non-Durrani Pashtuns (Ghilzais mostly) and Tajiks. After the Afghan state had sufficiently consolidated its power and no longer felt threatened by the tribes and the *ulema*, the Musahiban rulers embarked on a process of

[34] Rubin noted that from 1955 to 1978 the Soviet Union provide Afghanistan with $1.27 billion in economic aid and about $1.25 billion in military aid, while the US provided $533 million in economic aid (B. R. Rubin 1995, 20).

social change 'placing emphasis on education, infrastructure and industrialization' (Dorronsoro 2005, 61). Daud Khan resumed his modernisation plans in the early 1970s after a hiatus of a decade (1963-73) during which time he had been sidelined from power by his cousin, King Zahir Shah. Through a bloodless coup and with the aid of left-leaning army officers, Daud Khan abolished the 250-year-old Durrani monarchy and established a republic in 1973. The Soviet trained officers, which by the eve of the 1978 revolution numbered around 4,000 military officers emerged in the ranks of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and played a key role in Daud Khan's rise to power in 1973, as well as his violent removal from power in 1978. Over the long term though, the expansion in civilian and military bureaucracies which had taken place as a result of the professionalisation of the military and civil administration 'proved fatal to old patrimonial ties' opening the way for new, collectively-organised political elites to join the contest for state power (Barfield 2010, 211).

The 1960s were turbulent times. Earlier in the decade King Zahir Shah had assumed full power for himself and tried to play a more active role in politics. The 1964 constitution barred members of the royal family from holding government positions in an attempt to broaden the political system. The constitution intended to provide a new basis of political legitimacy for a monarchical regime that could no longer rely on earlier modes of legitimation. Limited parliamentary democracy was introduced into the country, but it was the king and not parliament that retained control over the government (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1205). The king refused to allow political parties to contest elections and the newly educated classes could not compete with traditional power holders because of their historical ties to the monarchy and greater access to economic resources. The majority of those elected to parliament were rural notables, tribal khans or *ulema* (Dorronsoro 2005, 77). It is not surprising that in the absence of political parties when elections had to be contested on personal basis, traditional power holders on the basis of their financial resources and tribal connections had more chances of entering parliament than the urban intelligentsia. The king had thus made sure that a loyal base of Durrani elites (rural and urban) got elected to parliament on whom he could then rely for political support. The power of the tribes in parliament helped strengthen the royal position as most of the Durrani khans-turned-legislatures supported the royal regime and opposed changes to the

political system. In a revealing article published in 1988, Hamid Karzai while explaining the reasons for Zahir Shah's relatively peaceful reign showed the extent to which the 1965 and 1969 parliament had been dominated by rural land owners and khans of the Durrani tribes, as well as a class of educated Durrani (Mohammadzai) legislators with close links to the monarchy, reinforcing the notion that historically the support of the tribes had been crucial to the stability of Afghan governments (Karzai 1988). As a powerful parliamentary group, most of the Durrani legislators, among them the local khans being the most pro-monarchy opposed any changes to the social and political system, remaining loyal to the royal regime. Parliamentary democracy under Zahir Shah may have temporarily strengthened the royal regime, but evidently at the expense of a strong central government, which had emerged during Daud Khan's first decade in power (1953-63). This represented the last attempt by Zahir Shah, by relying on patron-client relations and patrimonial interdependencies to maintain the legitimacy of royal authority and strengthen his grip on power in the face of increasing pressure for change.

However, the king's attempts to hold on to power and maintain the privileges of the ruling elites rather than accommodate the new social forces contesting power deepened the political crisis of the New Democracy era. Kabul University 'became a particular hotbed of political radicalism' in the 1960s, which progressively went underground because of state repression (Barfield 2010, 213). It was Kabul University rather than parliament where oppositional politics took shape and contests for power took its organised form with the emergence of modern political parties, including Islamist and leftist groups (Dorronsoro 2005). The new political discourse questioned the idea that power should be restricted to the royal lineage (Barfield 2010, 3–5). The dysfunctional political system during the last decade of Zahir Shah's rule and decrease in foreign aid after 1965 limited the government's ability to accommodate the newly educated classes, thus paved the way for, first Daud Khan's bloodless coup and later the communists to carry out a military coup, followed by a civil war and eventually the Soviet invasion in December 1979 (Dorronsoro 2005, 58–61). Over time, President Daud grew increasingly authoritarian. The 1977 constitution concentrated power in the hands of the executive, turning Afghanistan into a one-party state. After coming to power with the help of the PDPA, he attempted to marginalise his former Marxist allies from power. He initially

relied on the PDPA with strong following in the police and the army to crush his Islamist rivals forcing many of them, including Ahmad Shah Masoud and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to flee to Pakistan (Dorronsoro 2005, 81). Two days before the April 27 coup, Daud Khan ordered the arrest of PDPA leader Nur Mohammad Taraki and his deputy Hafizullah Amin. In response to the arrest of its leadership, pro-PDPA military officers on orders from Amin launched a military coup and brought down Daud's republican regime after only five years in power (D. B. Edwards 2002, 27–28).

For the first time in Afghanistan's modern history, professional officers trained abroad and in state schools and not the tribal *lashkars* toppled the central government, attesting to the impact of post-war (World War II) modernisation and development policies of Afghan rulers (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1206). Up to the 1950s the principal danger to the state emanated from combination of two forces - the Pashtun tribes and the *ulema*. However, by the 1960 and 1970s such oppositional movements had become a thing of the past, reflecting the overall success of the Musahiban rulers' policies in making these groups 'ever more marginal and less politically significant' (Barfield 2010, 198). After Daud Khan's first decade in power the balance of power had certainly changed in favour of the government and tribal power no longer presented a threat to central government policies and the consolidation of state power (Karzai 1988, 37). Daud Khan's notable achievement during this period was the modernisation and strengthening of the army. From this time onward, 'the military establishment became the primary objective for any group which wished to take control of the state' (Dorronsoro 2005, 79). The traditional route to power involved securing the support of tribal chiefs or external powers and coming on top in dynastic struggles within the royal lineage. Henceforth, military coups, starting with Daud Khan's own bloodless coup against Zahir Shah would become the main instrument of political change and the route to state power.

VII. The Saur revolution, Soviet invasion and the mujahedin resistance

The communist coup represented the end of an historical era in which only men of royal lineage contested state power. The overthrowing of the Durrani monarchy and then Daud Khan's (the last of the Durrani royals) removal from power showed in Edwards' words

'that kinship didn't matter, that literally anyone could lead the nation' and 'claim what had been until then the hereditary throne of the Durrani tribe' (D. B. Edwards 2002, 35). The humble background of the PDPA leader, Taraki aptly personified this historic change, it effectively ended the privileged position of the Durrani monarchs, tribal aristocracy and khans of the Pashtun tribes and traditional mullahs (Dorronsoro 2012, 40). But the momentum of change did not stop there. The resort to force rather than ideological persuasion in pursuit of modernisation led the educated classes, from whose ranks the leftist and Islamist groups had emerged to go down the path of war after 1978. The lack of administrative capacity in the state and PDPA's limited penetration of rural society had prevented the Afghan communists from carrying out a grass-roots revolution and made crude military force the likely response to rural revolts (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1208). Large numbers of rural notables and tribal leaders were killed during the revolution and the counter-revolutionary response by the mujahedin, a tactic that was revived by the Taliban in the post 2001 period.

Under PDPA rulers of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, especially Taraki and Amin the 'centralist and authoritarian aspects of Daud's regime' increased. A package of reforms aimed at the radical social transformation of society were introduced amid worsening tensions between Khalq and Parcham,[35] which eventually would lead to the Soviet invasion in December 1979 (Dorronsoro 2005, 87). The political purges carried out within the PDPA ranks, the Khalqis targeting Parchamis, weakened both the party and the army and police, which undermined the regime's ability to effectively deal with the mujahedin resistance supported by the United States and its allies. The social and economic reforms of the PDPA, ostensibly inspired by socialist-Marxist ideologies, focused on agrarian reform and gender relations and aimed at removing the old vestiges of power and social control. The regime's resort to violent methods and reliance on crude military force helped galvanise rural rebellions against the government, which were followed by larger urban uprisings in Herat and Gardez (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1208; Dorronsoro 2005, 91). The rural rebellions erupted spontaneously and lacked coordination, mostly led by local leaders. At the outset, popular uprisings against the

[35] The factional division between Khalq and Parcham, two rival factions within the PDPA, dated back to the party's founding years in the mid-1960s.

communist government were not organised in the name of ideology. It was later that the various demands of the population coalesced under the banner of jihad which served to legitimate the rural rebellions (Dorronsoro 2005, 105). The resistance parties, led by Islamic intellectuals based out of Pakistan emerged after the initial, spontaneous uprisings and gradually took over and expanded the armed struggle.

Mujahedin commanders and pro-government militia leaders rose to power during this period of Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up the PDPA government against the Islamist insurgency, the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan responded by offering military and financial aid to the resistance groups made up of Islamist parties based in Pakistan. In the next decade, Western arms and money brought about a revolution in military technology, whose earlier origins can be traced to the arrival of matchlock rifles during the Anglo-Afghan wars to AK-47 rifles, Stinger missiles and IEDs during the jihad against Soviet forces – and eventually culminate in the use of suicide bombing in response to the US-NATO military occupation from 2001 onwards. The war years resulted in greatly transforming social relations and changed the rural countryside; in the new political economy of war a different set of local power holders emerged - entrepreneurs of violence asserted themselves militarily. As Dorronsoro (2005) pointed out, mujahedin commanders emerged from a mixed background: some belonged to wealthy, land-owning semi-aristocratic families, like Aref Khan in Kunduz (chapter 8) and Abdul Haq in the Kabul region (M. L. Edwards 2011). Others belonged to the educated class, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of Hizb-e-Islami and Ahmad Shah Masoud, Jamiat-e-Islami's main military commander in the northeast (Giustozzi 2009b).

The mujahedin commanders found an opportunity in the jihad to penetrate 'the countryside as no external political force had previously been able to do'. The 'insurgency linked nearly every Afghan village to political parties and the international state system' through mujahedin resistance parties in Pakistan (B. R. Rubin 1988, 1208–09). The transformation of the countryside during the war years shred the metaphorical 'mud curtain' that Dupree says Afghan villagers erected to keep the outside world at bay (Dupree 1973). The domination of the countryside by local commanders was perhaps the most remarkable impact of the war (Roy 1990). As a result the influence of the old rural

elite was replaced by military commanders and militant mullahs who relied on their militias rather than tribal authority for power, but took to emulating the practices of the old khans by distributing patronage to their armed followers using a system of military patrimonialism, defined as 'the control exerted by the military class over armed men and territory' (Giustozzi 2009b, 8). Local commanders later emerged as de facto rulers of their areas in the 1990s. This period saw a great deal of decentralisation of the means of violence and the emergence of new forms of authority; military commanders and militia leaders (Cramer and Goodhand 2002; Mamdani 2005; Dorronsoro 2005).

By mid-1980s, the Soviet leadership concluded that it was not possible to militarily defeat the mujahedin. In the meantime, the worst excesses of Amin's regime had been curbed and a more moderate Parchami leader, Babrak Karmal was installed in power days after Soviet troops killed Amin on Christmas Eve 1979. Under Karmal (1980-86) the factional struggles within PDPA intensified mainly as a result of his attempt to tighten his grip over a party whose membership consisted of seventy five per cent Khalqi cadres, to the detriment of the party's organisational structure which splintered along ethnic lines (Dorronsoro 2005, 175). Amidst escalating casualties, the counterinsurgency effort by Soviet and Afghan forces failed to bring about a decisive change in the military situation (Braithwaite 2011; Kalinovsky 2011). The Soviet's military presence in Afghanistan never exceeded 100,000 troops. During this period the Soviet intervention had three dimensions to it. An institutional building approach involving Soviet advisors focused on urban areas and the state apparatus with the aim of building capacity and deciding the general direction of government policy. It involved ideological training in schools and party organs, including unions, militias, women's organisations and officials and indoctrination of thousands of Afghan children in schools in Central Asia and other parts of the Soviet Union. Sovietisation in turn depended on getting a firmer handle on the military situation by crushing the mujahedin insurgency. Pacification was mainly focused on grey-areas, which fell between towns held by the government and the countryside mostly held by the mujahedin. In these buffer zones, the government attempted to set up local militias, recruit notables and mobilise the clergy with the overall aim of re-establishing government authority and legitimacy. In areas outside government control,

those held by the mujahedin, open warfare frequently broke out with the intention to drive out the population and weaken the insurgents (Dorronsoro 2005).

Under the guidance of the KGB (Soviet secret service) the Afghan secret service, the *KHAD* would emerge as the main instrument of the government's counterinsurgency effort. Over the course of the war, the *KHAD*, led by the future president Dr. Najibullah, became a complex organisation and one of the best-financed and efficient institutions in the country. There was a greater para-militarisation of the secret service with its own military units taking part in direct combat against insurgents (a similar development took place two decades later during the US intervention). A similar dynamic of para-militarisation took place in the national police force (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011). The primary objective of the counterinsurgency was to re-establish government authority in areas which had slipped out of government control as a result of mujahedin military activities. The need for the pacification of the countryside led the regime to change course and make significant concessions on socio-economic policy. It set aside Taraki and Amin's most controversial social reforms such as agrarian reform and initiated the process of recruiting rural notables and members of the religious establishment and the establishment of local militias with the overall aim of enhancing the government's basic legitimacy, isolating the mujahedin and pacifying the countryside. All in all, the Soviet counterinsurgency strategy failed to bring about a military defeat of the mujahedin. When the decision had been made to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan, power was transferred to Dr. Najibullah in 1986. His ascendance to power was meant to set the scene for the eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. To that end, he launched the process of national reconciliation under which the party underwent a makeover, setting aside its Marxist ideology in favour of Islam (as the official religion) and a nationalist framework in the hope of broadening its appeal to non-PDPA and mujahedin factions.

The establishment of militias, which began under Karmal vastly expanded during the reign of his successor, President Najibullah (1986-1992). The government's increasing reliance on militias shifted the balance between regular and irregular forces. In Herat for example, the army's 17th division consisted of 3,400 regular troops and 14,000 militiamen. By the time of the withdrawal of Soviet forces about a hundred thousand

former mujahedin had also joined the various militia formations (Giustozzi 2009b, 54). Rubin noted that in the early 1990s the number of armed men in government militia units was estimated at sixty to seventy thousand or twice the size of the regular army (B. R. Rubin 1995, 160–61). Local militias, mostly recruited on individual basis and along ethnic lines, played a key role in the government's counterinsurgency strategy involving the establishment of buffer zones between the towns under government control and the countryside where the mujahedin remained in control. They were responsible for securing roads such as the Kabul-Mazar highway, limiting mujahedin incursions from the countryside into urban areas by securing the outskirts of towns and in general limiting their mobility. The leaders of some of these militias later on emerged as local and regional strongmen. They included Juma Khan's Andarabi militias and Sayed Mansoor Naderi's Ismaili militias in Baghlan, Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jawzjani-Uzbek militias - one of the largest militias in the country, and Ismat Muslim's Durrani-Pashtun militias in Spin Boldak in Kandahar (B. R. Rubin 1995, 158–61; Giustozzi 2009b, 53–67).

Following the Geneva Accords, the Soviet military completed its withdrawal in 1989. President Najibullah managed to stay in power until 1992 and successfully held his own against attempts, notably the attack on Jalalabad in the spring of 1989 by the mujahedin to oust him from power. Although the regime had gradually weakened from the inside because of differences among the leadership over the policy of national reconciliation, Najibullah was able to prolong his stay in power due to his ability to balance the power of different factions within his government, exploit divisions within the opposition by buying off support among different groups, and patronising a vast network of local militias. Najibullah's government collapsed once the external subsidies that had bankrolled his army and stabilised patrimonial alliances with militia commanders were ended by Moscow. A lose coalition of the mujahedin parties and Dostum's Uzbek militias seized Kabul in April 1992, following change of power in the north. The mujahedin leaders installed a new government and Afghanistan was declared the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in an attempt to give Islamic legitimacy to the regime and in so doing reverted to a long-standing tradition of Afghan rulers using Islam to boost their political legitimacy after taking power (Olesen 1995, 303).

After the collapse of Najibullah's regime the regular army underwent a process of 'demodernization', whereby over time fragments of the regular army in the north gradually assumed the character of local militias (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014, 6). By contrast, Dostum's military organisation, who emerged as a pro-government militia leader in the mid-1980s, underwent significant changes and by the late 1980s and early 1990s had taken on the character of a regular army. He inherited the bulk of the Afghan army assets in the north and emerged as a northern strongman. Alongside Ismail Khan in the west, Dostum's power structure in the north has been described by Giustozzi as a 'warlord polity', understood to be a territorial domain controlled by a military leader with the help of his own army, police, civil administration and taxation apparatus, with control over many provinces (Giustozzi 2009b). As the examples of Ismail Khan and Dostum indicate, the war years resulted in the growing assertiveness of non-Pashtun groups, including Hazaras, Uzbeks and Tajiks.

Except in a few cases, mujahedin commanders and pro-government militia leaders who ascended to positions of state power in 1992 failed to establish any semblance of order. Power struggles, in particular between Jamiat and Hizb[36] had frequently occurred throughout the decade of jihad in the 1980s. Vicious armed clashes between Jamiat, initially backed by Dostum's militias and Hizb and Hazara fighters belonging to Hizb-e-Wahdat - a coalition of Shia mujahedin groups - erupted in the capital soon after taking power. The brutal nature of the fighting, which reduced Kabul to rubble, caused thousands of civilian casualties and displaced hundreds of thousands of the city's resident, seriously discredited jihadi commanders and mujahedin party leaders. The legitimacy they had won as freedom fighters was lost as the conflict dragged on and the city and much of the country split along factional lines. The period of factional fighting in the capital and other parts of the country, including Wardak,[37] Baghlan and Kunduz that followed the collapse of Najibullah's government marked the darkest period of the war. Various commanders competed for the control of strategic roads, key towns and prized

[36] After 2001, Hizb-e-Islami, one of the seven mujahedin parties based in Pakistan during the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad, split into two factions. The political wing is part of Karzai's government. The military wing is led by the founder, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and is active in the insurgency.

[37] In Wardak factional fighting between Hizb and Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami in the early 1990s claimed more than three thousand lives in and around the provincial capital Maidanshahr (chapter 6).

government ministries and provincial departments and killed and pillaged with impunity. The mujahedin coalition government, headed by Jamiat leader Burhanuddin Rabbani remained fragmented as neighbouring countries backed different mujahedin groups in the battle for control. Military domination and political control during the mujahedin reign remained fragmented in most parts of the country, except for Ismail Khan in the west, Abdul Rashid Dostum in the north, Ahmad Shah Masoud in the Panjshir valley and the northeast and the Arsala family in the east. Kabul, like Kunduz and Baghlan, remained divided among different factions until the Taliban captured it in 1996.

The proliferation of weapons, mass migration, foreign aid and NGOs and shifts in the political economy, notably the increasingly regionalised nature of politico military networks, especially after the decline of superpower funding and the growing dependence on the local war economy to mobilise resources had important implications for political and military control. To substitute for the missing patronage from foreign powers, government and insurgent commanders were forced to 'privatize' their activities to generate rents from local economic resources. By the early 1990s a new kind of conflict economy, localised but globally connected 'criminalised' economy had emerged that revolved around the physical control of major trade and logistics routes, border crossing points and customs, mines, and timber and opium harvesting areas. The most basic form of rent extraction by conflict entrepreneurs included setting up roadblocks and shaking down travellers and taxing smuggled goods (B. R. Rubin 2000; Goodhand 2005; Giustozzi 2007).

After the capture of Kandahar in 1994, followed by Kabul in 1996 the Taliban rapidly progressed towards the north and in a relatively short time established control over much of the country. The Taliban established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on the basis of a strict interpretation of the Sharia and promised to disarm abusive mujahedin commanders and restore law and order, which to some extent they managed to do. However, a few remote areas in the northeast remained outside the Taliban's control. Those areas were under the control of the newly constituted Northern Alliance, comprising of a handful of mujahedin factions that had evacuated Kabul ahead of the Taliban takeover and escaped to the north, plus former government militias such as Dostum's Gelamjam forces. The Taliban's hold over the north was by no means secure,

the Northern Alliance put up stiff resistance in many parts of the north and managed to recapture, if only briefly, important strongholds lost to the Taliban such as Mazar-i-Sharif. Throughout the second half of the 1990s, fighting continued to rage on north of Kabul and in parts of the northeast where frontlines frequently shifted and regular contests over the control of territory between Taliban and Ahmad Shah Masoud's forces led to series of retaliatory attacks against the local population, notable being the Taliban's scorched earth tactics that reduced much of the Shamali plain north of Kabul to ruins.[38] Hazara mujahedin groups in the Central Highlands also put up strong resistance to Taliban's domination of their historic stronghold. As in the Shamali plain, the fragility of Taliban's military control in the Central Highlands was partly responsible for their brutal treatment of the local Hazara population in places such as Yakawlang district, where the Taliban reportedly massacred scores of civilians.

During this period, the Taliban succeeded to some extent in disarming wayward commanders and centralising the means of coercion. As the empirical chapters show, not all the mujahedin commanders disappeared from the local scene following the Taliban takeover. In Pashtun areas a number of commanders with Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami affiliation from whose ranks many of the Taliban's own cadres had emerged, and in some cases Hizb-e-Islami commanders were incorporated into Taliban military ranks. After being marginalised from power during the Taliban period (1994-2001), mujahedin commanders and militia leaders returned to power following the ouster of Taliban from power by the US military intervention in 2001 and resumed their functions as politico-military leaders in the Bonn-mandated political framework. The memory of anti-Soviet jihad and the defence of nation and Islam had to be frequently invoked by mujahidden commanders in an attempt to restore the political legitimacy they had lost during factional fighting in the 1990s and to push back against growing criticism of their abusive conduct and political and economic dominance after 2001 (Bhatia 2007).

[38] Some local observers compared the Taliban's scorch-earth policy to that of Soviet Forces in the 1980s, explaining such tactics on the basis of military necessity, as the lush fruit orchards of the Shamali plains were used by mujahedin fighters to attack Soviet and government forces.

VIII. Conclusions

This chapter provided an historical account of the uneven process of state formation in Afghanistan. It began in 1747 with the establishment of the Durrani Empire and traced the decidedly non-linear evolution of the major political and economical developments until the period preceding the US military intervention in 2001. The account foregrounded the colonial encounter and Afghanistan's emergence as a buffer state in order to highlight the wider imperial landscape and the centrality of transnational resources and political, military and economic influences that shaped and transformed state formation in Afghanistan. It showed that British subsidies played a vital role in the bureaucratisation and centralisation of power under Abdul Rahman Khan and their loss after independence in 1919 had importance consequences for Afghan statebuilders in the twentieth century. The rentier dynamics of Afghan statebuilding, which dominated the Musahiban period, resonated with the statebuilding strategies of Afghan rulers post-2001. Another important continuity between the past and the present day has been politico-military networks forged during the war years, which shaped the post 2001 institutional landscape.

I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter the shifting centripetal and centrifugal dynamics associated with statebuilding and contestation over power. These are bound up with tussles over the mobilisation of capital, coercion and legitimacy. Historically, the Afghan state imposed direct rule when the cost of administering territories was sufficiently compensated by the extraction of surplus from the local economy. Otherwise, when it was cheap and desirable political control was achieved through indirect rule (Barfield 2004). The British colonial administration in India, for example, directly administered productive areas but relied on tribal khans and *maliks* to administer the barren Pashtun borderlands adjoining Afghanistan. Afghan rulers, reacting to the demands of the different times, have similarly oscillated between the two approaches to political control; they sometimes relied on local power holders for taxation and conscription and when the imperatives of centralisation demanded introduced direct taxation and military conscription.

Therefore, the trajectory of statebuilding changed over time, reflecting the shifting balance of forces within and outside Afghanistan, from the early and late Durrani period, through to the colonial period and when Afghanistan emerged as a buffer state. Similarly, post-independence period when foreign subsidies were mostly replaced with local revenues, as indicated by the high level of taxation of the local economy and the rentier development of the state after WW-II drew on different sets of resources and political arrangements. In the early phase of the empire, the conquest of territory and plunder of northern India provided for the bulk of Durrani state revenues, which facilitated relations with a large groups of Durrani elites and tribal chiefs. During Ahmad Shah Durrani's reign this practice cost the state treasury more than half of its revenues. As the empire fell into decline and opportunities for external plunder ended, more and more revenues had to be generated internally - plunder was internalised through taxation of trade and agriculture.

Dost Mohammad Khan initiated the process of centralisation of military service and taxation, which reduced the power of local powerbrokers. Abdul Rahman Khan went further and abolished most of the privileges awarded to the royal clan, tribal leaders and the clergy. British subsidies helped him build civil and military bureaucracies and centralise state power. The modernising reforms of Amanullah included raising taxes and downsizing the army and ending special privileges, which represented a significant change in the distribution of power and resources and resulted in rebellions that ended his reign. The Musahiban rulers reduced state dependence on domestic extraction when international aid replaced taxation as a major source of state revenue after WW-II. The war years saw a growing decentralisation of the means of violence, the regionalisation of politico-military networks and the emergence of a conflict economy dominated by military entrepreneurs. The post-2001 political order has partly evolved in relation to these changes. It helps to explain the dynamics of integrating commander-networks in the emergent state structures using brokerage and patronage practices. In the following chapter, I discuss this phase of statebuilding in Afghanistan.

Chapter 5: Rebuilding the 'old' Afghanistan: counterinsurgency, local militias and post-2001 statebuilding

I. Introduction

This chapter examines the national-level military and political landscape in post-2001 Afghanistan.[39] The chapter begins with a discussion of the military and political fragmentation in the aftermath of the US military overthrow of the Taliban and the gradual reassembling and consolidation of governmental power and central authority that followed. Central to this discussion is the role of brokerage and patronage politics in consolidating the Bonn political settlement, a hurriedly negotiated 'bargaining outcome' among the major anti-Taliban political and military factions – eventually leading to the emergence of a centralised patrimonial order. The emerging political order represented a dominant coalition of 'privileged insiders' which controlled most of the valuable political and economic resources that generated rents and special privileges.[40] Political and economic privileges were primarily obtained from the international war-and-aid economy as well as the primitive accumulation of domestic resources by wartime accumulators. As such this outcome represented 'more of a "negotiated" enterprise than a Weberian state' (Mukhopadhyay 2014, 12).

The chapter examines how the expansion of the insurgency, the rise of American counterinsurgency doctrine and increased military and developmental spending that accompanied the deployment of additional foreign troops provided a 'second chance' for local commanders, some of whom had lost their military and economic power during the first half of the decade to reinvent themselves as anti-Taliban militias. However, arming militia commanders outside central government control, as the US military began to do after 2009 represented a threat to the political and economic domination of 'privileged insiders' in the post-2001 order. Any attempts aimed at renegotiating the 'elite bargain'

[39] The empirical chapters use case studies to provide a snapshot of the military and political developments at the provincial level, which will not be covered here.

[40] The post-2001 governing class arguably consisted of a handful of powerful families and four to five hundred individuals. Together they controlled the levers of power and the majority of public and private resources. Interview # 83, 5.11.2012. See Annex 1 for a list of interviews.

underpinning that order meant changes in the institutional framework of the state and the broader social relations of reproduction and domination (chapter 7 & 8). The need to protect his own powerbase prompted President Karzai to assert his authority more forcefully in order to regulate the flow of direct US military patronage to local commanders and maintain his tenuous control over armed groups at the periphery.

The previous chapters provided an analytical and historical lens for understanding evolving governance relations and political developments in contemporary Afghanistan. After 2001 one can broadly identify two different political trajectories. Initially, the intervention aimed at the centralisation of power to overcome the decentralisation of coercion and political authority under the mujahedin in the 1990s, many of whom had regained power as US military allies in 2001 (Barfield 2010). From the mid-decade onward, as the insurgency intensified and Western disillusionment with Karzai's government grew the fantasy of 'good governance' was displaced onto decentralised, local governance and targeted killing of insurgent leaders as part of a revamped counterinsurgency campaign (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). Comparisons between US and Soviet counterinsurgency reveal some similarities, particularly the early ambition to transform Afghan society through social engineering and the subsequent shift in the logic of intervention towards a reliance on local power holders, brokerage and patronage relations (Dorronsoro 2005). In both instances, the pacification policy was based on an idealised and essentialist reading of Afghanistan as a 'tribal' polity.

This chapter begins by first mapping out the political landscape dominated by warlords and local commanders who fought alongside US forces to topple the Taliban regime. The crucial role of commander-networks in the emergence and evolution of government-backed militias is revealed in the second half of the chapter. It concludes with a brief overview of the emergence of the ALP programme as a basis for understanding subsequent developments related to the arming of local militias at the provincial level that are discussed in the three empirical chapters (6, 7 & 8) that follow.

II. Bringing the warlords back in

By 2001, the Taliban had seriously weakened the jihadi leaders and local commanders who had gained power in 1992 and afterwards fought one another until the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996 and installed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban seizer of power reversed the brief political and military ascendance of non-Pashtun groups from northern Afghanistan. The Taliban's push into the north prompted an unstable military-political alliance among the major anti-Taliban factions. Despite the loss of Kabul, Shura-e-Nizar (military arm of Jamiat-e-Islami) still maintained a large military force in the northeast of the country. Otherwise little remained of the patronage networks that had linked local commanders in the provinces to the mujahedin coalition government, headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani in Kabul (Giustozzi 2009b, 87). In comparison to the military and political fragmentation of the mujahedin period, the Taliban represented a disciplined and centralised militia force. In the next few years they succeeded, to some extent, in disarming wayward commanders and centralising the means of coercion.

The US-led military invasion of October 2001, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, resulted in a significant realignment of political and military forces in Afghanistan. Unlike Iraq in 2003 where the US military deployed a large ground force to topple Saddam Hussein's regime, in Afghanistan it relied on a small contingent of Special Forces and CIA agents backed by US airpower and Northern Alliance militias, a loose coalition of several anti-Taliban mujahedin factions to topple the Taliban regime (Suhrke 2011b, 37–38). In this war, the US assistance to the Northern Alliance consisted of air support and cash and military supplies to militia commanders. The cash (estimated at $70 million) enabled Northern Alliance leaders to buy off local commanders who had earlier joined the Taliban, and remobilise others who had been disarmed by the Taliban or under pressure had left their areas (see chapter 7 & 8). With American cash and weapons northern militia commanders like Abdul Rashid Dostum and Atta Mohammad Noor expanded the size of their forces from only a few hundred to several thousand. Mainly due to US support the number of anti-Taliban militias in early 2002 had increased to a few hundred thousand (Giustozzi 2009b, 88–89). In the south and east the absence of a unifying structure like Shura-e-Nizar in the north meant that the US military's decision to arm anti-Taliban

commanders in the south and east led to further military fragmentation. Overall, the outcome represented a return to the military fragmentation and decentralisation of violence during the mujahedin rule in the early 1990s.

By the time the Bonn Conference convened in December 2001 to negotiate the terms of a political settlement among the victors of the US-sponsored War on Terror and form an interim administration, the capital and many other parts of the country had fallen into the hands of Jamiat and Northern Alliance factions or local anti-Taliban commander-networks.[41] Jamiat commanders took control of key government ministries in Kabul and the majority of provincial administrations in the northeast. In provinces where military control was more fragmented mujahedin governing shuras were established for the purpose of power sharing between competing groups (chapters 6, 7 and 8). Military and political control on the ground strongly influenced the negotiations in Bonn over the structure of the new government.[42] It greatly increased the negotiating power of Northern Alliance factions, enabling them to shape the elite bargain to serve their interests.[43] The 'light-footprint' approach advocated by the UN during the negotiations reflected the actual power on the ground rather than a normative position by the UN leadership. The political outcome in Bonn further reinforced the de facto power of the ruling coalition dominated by Northern Alliance powerbrokers. These powerbrokers succeeded in establishing a fragmented form of control and integrated their militias into the district and provincial administrative structures. In Kabul, Northern Alliance commanders took advantage of their control of the city to integrate their militias in the ministries of defence, interior and national security. An international security force (ISAF) was deployed to the capital to act as an interposing force between the different armed factions and to protect the interim administration. Efforts, including by the UN, to expand this force were initially resisted by the US.

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[41] A handful of regional authorities provided military and political control outside Kabul. They included Junbish and Jamiat in the north and northeast, Gul Agha Shirzai in Kandahar, Ismail Khan in Herat, Shura-e-Nizar in Kabul and Wahdat in Bamyan. Overall, in the south and east military control was more fluid.
[42] The Bonn Agreement served as a legal and political road map based on the vision of a unitary state. Some of the landmark events of the Bonn process included the Emergency Loya Jirga, the Constitutional Loya Jirga and presidential election in October 2004, which Hamid Karzai won by a comfortable margin.
[43] Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami were excluded from the Bonn negotiations because they emerged on the losing side of the US-led war. The Bonn political settlement represented an 'elite bargain' among the victors and was aimed at securing their political and economic privileges.

A series of defining events, beginning with the US-led military invasion laid the framework for the re-emergence of violent entrepreneurs[44] and the reassembling of the state. Warlords were the dominant force in the UN-sponsored Bonn negotiations and subsequently dominated the Emergency Loya Jirga[45] (Dorronsoro 2005, 329–330). The event formally entrenched the de facto political authority and military control of Northern Alliance commanders in the early years of the transition. As chapter 7 will show, it essentially legitimised the kind of power grab that Rasoul Khan Mohsini and his brothers orchestrated in Baghlan after 2001 and the marginalisation of Pashtuns that followed. The incorporation of local powerbrokers was a crucial factor in reconstructing the state apparatus after 2001 (ibid 2005, 336). The political significance of this realignment of forces was in the ascendance to power of non-Pashtun armed groups like Shura-e-Nizar, dominated by Tajiks from the Panjshir valley north of Kabul.

This point relates to the political economy of war in the 1980s and 1990s, discussed in the previous chapter, and the growing assertiveness of groups who had asserted themselves militarily - and now sought to convert this into political capital and positions in the new government – including Hazaras, Uzbeks and Tajiks. Members of Shura-e-Nizar, including defence minister and vice president Fahim Qasim, interior minister Younis Qanooni and foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah featured prominently in the political settlement negotiated in Bonn. Under international pressure modernising technocrats and former aristocratic elite from the Afghan diaspora in Western countries were also included in the coalition government. They constituted the weakest link of the new political architecture dominated by military and jihadi leaders. Even though headed by a Popalzai Pashtun, Hamid Karzai, the political outcome represented yet another reversal of the historical dominance of Pashtuns, in particular Durrani Pashtuns, who had ruled the country for over two hundred years up until the leftist coup d'état in 1978.

[44] Violent entrepreneurs are defined as 'a category of men who take up arms and who wield violence or the threat of violence as their stock in trade' (Gallant 1999, 26–27). In the Afghan context the term is used to refer to warlords, mujahedin commanders and militia leaders.

[45] Convened in June 2002, the role of ELJ was to transfer power from the interim administration chosen by a few powerbrokers in Bonn to a Transitional Authority government chosen by delegates elected by people from some 400 district assemblies. The ELJ extended Karzai's office term until presidential election in 2004.

Essentially the three groups vying for power after the fall of the Taliban were royalists, technocrats and mujahedin commanders.

The appointment of Karzai as head of the interim administration was intended to compensate for under-representation of Pashtuns and lend political legitimacy to a government dominated by Tajiks. The shift in power was clearly reflected in the distribution of positions in the administration, particularly within the power ministries (defence, interior etc). The Northern Alliance took over seventeen of the thirty government ministries, including the two vice presidency positions. Only the presidency and the ministry of finance were headed by aristocratic Pashtuns in 2002 (Giustozzi 2009b, 90–91).[46] At the provincial level, of the thirty-two provincial governors, twenty were leaders of armed factions. The government's own data pointed to the pre-eminence of Northern Alliance factions in key ministries but also in the bureaucracy, army and police. The Tajiks emerged as the main beneficiaries of the political transition while the Pashtuns, Uzbek and Hazaras were under-represented in the distribution of power.[47]

The Northern Alliance leaders resisted UN pressure to disarm their militias (B. R. Rubin 2003). Many of the militias were gradually formalised under the Afghan Military Force (AMF) structure, which in effect gave them the status of the official armed forces of the country under the command of the ministry of defence. The AMF was later targeted by the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme (2003-2006). The armed groups remaining outside the AMF structure became the object of DIAG – disarmament of illegal armed groups. These disarmament initiatives were manipulated to serve the agendas of both national and international actors. The US military deliberately hindered both DDR and DIAG and continued to arm local militias in pursuit of its counterterrorism agenda. The ministry of defence under the leadership of Fahim resisted Western-backed reforms in the ministry because they threatened to undo the military

[46] The Northern Alliance factions attending the Bonn negotiations were far from united. A number of jihadi leaders and militia commanders protested the power grab by Shura-e-Nizar. Karim Khalili, Haji Qadir, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Abdul rab-Rasoul Sayyaf and Ismail Khan objected to the lack of ethnic representation and the 'monopoly over power' enjoyed by the Panjshiri members of Shura-e-Nizar (Dorronsoro 2005, 329).

[47] In 2006 government data showed that 53% of government posts were dominated by Tajiks compared to 34% by Pashtuns and 4% by Hazara and Uzbek respectively (Sharan 2013b).

patrimonial architecture which had until then sustained military alliances between Northern Alliance power holders in the central government and military commanders in the provinces. In principle, Fahim supported the centralising agenda of President Karzai as long as 'he could benefit from the process and use it against his factional rivals' and strengthen the power of his local allies (Giustozzi 2009b, 90). He integrated a number of loyal anti-Taliban commanders and their local militias into the national army, while rival groups were subjected to downsizing and disarmament drives (Giustozzi 2008).

Although the DDR initiative partially rolled back Fahim's politico-military networks within the structure of the ministry of defence, the reforms did not significantly reduce the presence of armed groups in the provinces. When DDR ended in 2006 there were an estimated 2,753 illegal armed groups numbering around 180,000 armed men throughout the country, a clear sign that it had failed to make a significant impact in reducing the number of armed groups (Giustozzi 2009b, 91).[48] Local commanders and regional strongmen had successfully subverted attempts to demobilise their local militias. Instead, the most effective way to maintain armed groups was to integrate them into the national police force (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013; Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). As a result Jamiat-affiliated armed groups had the highest rate of reintegration in the Afghan national police (Giustozzi 2008; Bhatia and Sedra 2008).[49] The dominance of local militias in the police force mainly ensured the militarisation of the local security architecture. Because of this accommodationist approach toward local powerbrokers and regional strongmen, patrimonial practices prevailed over half-hearted attempts at reform and institution

[48] Illegal armed groups referred to those individuals or groups who operated outside the official structure of the ministry of defence and interior – essentially those who were not incorporated into the security organs after 2001. The local security architecture, in addition to foreign forces and insurgents included different entrepreneurs of violence - mujahedin and former government militias who were incorporated into the army and police force, local militias connected to local powerbrokers and regional warlords. For example the arbaki militias in Kunduz were not officially part of the provincial security structure but remained loyal to vice president Fahim Qasim and local strongman Mir Alam (chapter 8). The empirical chapters show that it was often difficult to tell government and non-state armed groups apart as they continued to maintain close links – and at times of crisis, for example when the Taliban intensified pressure on Kunduz in 2009 the provincial police fought alongside local jihadi commanders who were not part of the police force but maintained their own groups – as a result the security landscape was fragmented due to the presence of competing armed groups.

[49] On DDR and DIAG programmes, see (Stapleton 2010).

building. As a result, until the mid-decade the bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of security forces proceeded very slowly (Giustozzi 2009b, 90).

Initially, Karzai's authority remained weak as his cabinet was dominated by Shura-e-Nizar warlords and commanders. Strongmen linked to defence minister Fahim and other Northern Alliance leaders controlled the provincial and district administration and maintained their own militias. Although this outcome is taken as a sign of fragmentation of military and political authority and the re-emergence of 'warlord polities',[50] over time the local armed groups were co-opted through commander-networks and integrated into the military structures of the ministries of defence and interior as well as national security, which were dominated by the Northern Alliance. Jamiat leaders used their dominance in the 'power ministries' and influence in the presidency to form extensive patronage networks which served to facilitate the growing relations of interdependencies between the central government and local and regional power holders allied to them. Instead of dismantling Shura-e-Nizar and Jamiat's hold over power, Karzai built his own and the central government's powerbase in the immediate post-2001 period by relying on and frequently manipulating patrimonial alliances with warlords in the cabinet and local strongmen at the periphery. It appears that Karzai and Fahim separately built their local bases of support as a way of avoiding confrontation over the distribution of power. As defence minister (2002-04), Fahim principally focused his efforts on consolidating and expanding his power base in northern regions of the country where there was a strong Jamiat presence in competition with Junbish, Dostum's party. President Karzai, on the other hand concentrated his efforts through his brother Ahmad Wali Karzai on southern Afghanistan aimed at building stronger relationships with local commanders and regional strongmen in Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand provinces (Giustozzi 2009b, 90). As I show below, the political alliance between Karzai and Fahim helped in stabilising relations between north and south.

The ruling regime, initially underpinned by Shura-e-Nizar and further consolidated by Karzai underwent frequent changes with the selective inclusion of Northern Alliance

[50] A warlord polity, according to Giustozzi, corresponded with political and military control by a warlord over many provinces, such as Ismail Khan in Herat who maintained a military force, run a civil administration and controlled revenue from customs duties and local taxation (Giustozzi 2009b).

powerbrokers and reformist ministers in power. Presidential and parliamentary elections were key turning points, providing opportunities to renegotiate the terms and composition of political settlements at the national, provincial and local levels. According to Sharan, after the Emergency Loya Jirga of 2002, Karzai began to sideline the jihadi networks from the cabinet – at the periphery he relied on divide-and-rule tactics and played one commander against another to enhance his authority. From this perspective, the 2002-04 period represented contestations over the control of the state between Karzai and his technocratic Pashtun ministers on one side, and Northern Alliance mujahedin networks on the other. As a result, there was a shift of power from mujahedin leaders to Pashtun technocratic elites around Karzai. The temporary ascendancy of predominantly Pashtun technocrats proved short lived however. Because of the imperatives of the 2004 and 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections, coinciding with a rising insurgency, Karzai found it necessary to once again rely on jihadi networks whose support was deemed necessary for winning elections. As a result, technocrats favoured by Western donors lost ground to factional leaders (Sharan 2013b). For example, in the north Karzai relied upon the newly appointed governor Atta Mohammad Noor in Balkh to help secure northern votes which presidential candidate Abdul Rashid Dostum, a long-time rival of Atta also coveted. These power configurations changed again in the lead up to the 2009 elections; Atta shifted his support to presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah, a fellow Jamiati, while Dostum who had run against Karzai in the 2004 election was rehabilitated to secure the important Uzbek vote for Karzai (Humayoon 2010).

As evidenced by armed clashes between supposed allies, for example between Dostum and Atta in Balkh (Mukhopadhyay 2009) the emerging order was built on shaky foundations – the Northern Alliance was a deeply fragmented coalition of local commanders. Over time, however, the fluid and decentralised military-patrimonial order that emerged on the battlefield in 2001 was unevenly incorporated into emergent state structures, bankrolled by international military and development actors. Therefore, a situation of military and political fragmentation in the early years changed over time to become a more stable and hierarchical political order focused around a ruling elite in Kabul led by Karzai and Fahim, which frequently changed due to the imperatives of elections and the growth of the insurgency. Centralisation of power was mainly based on

building patrimonial networks and expanding the clientele base, and when necessary weakening and fragmenting the power base of local and regional strongmen, sometimes in order to limit their autonomy and increase their dependency on the central government.[51] The initial arm twisting between Atta and Karzai and eventually his appointment as governor of Balkh is a well documented case of the centrality of brokerage and patronage politics in the emergence of relatively stable political orders and the reassembling of the Afghan state after 2001 (Mukhopadhyay 2014).

III. Armed politics and the consolidation of state power

It is worth noting that after toppling the Taliban regime, the US strategic goal was limited to the pursuit of the War on Terror, to capture and kill remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. President George W. Bush had declared that the US was not in the business of nation-building (Chesterman 2004a). In 2004 the US reversed its stand and provided support to statebuilding, which was meant to rebuild state institutions and facilitate Western exit from Afghanistan. As a result, Western commitment and investment gradually increased over time. The US also reversed its objection to the expansion of ISAF beyond Kabul. Since American troops were caught up in Iraq, the US shifted the burden for deploying fresh troops to its European NATO allies (Suhrke 2011b, 41–42). The European contribution, although driven by the need to reiterate Europe's military and political partnership with the US in the framework of NATO was instrumental in changing the focus of intervention from the initial limited goal of regime change and counter-terrorism to a broader liberal peace project aimed at political and economic transformation and rebuilding state institutions (Paris and Sisk 2009). The expansion of the US role and the flow of additional resources, including vast military spending would play a crucial role in strengthening the economic base of local strongmen and when co-opted by the centre, in consolidating patronage networks linked to President Karzai and an emerging ruling elite in Kabul.

[51] Ismail Khan's removal from power in Herat and his appointment to the cabinet is one such a case. See (Giustozzi 2004).

Statebuilding in Afghanistan is 'often distilled into a struggle on the part of a feeble centre to tame its wilder periphery' where rebellious tribal chieftains, defiant mullahs, and lately warlords intermittently held sway in opposition to the central government (Mukhopadhyay 2014, 1–4). From a liberal perspective, warlords and strongmen were expected to wither away as the central government gained more strength under international tutelage. In theory, there was no role envisaged for them in rebuilding institutional power and political authority in post-2001 Afghanistan. But this liberal reading excluded from analytical focus alternative conceptions of power and ruling practices, in particular the role of men of violence and hierarchically organised patrimonial networks and practices in reconstructing the state apparatus. The analytic of patrimonialism[52] foregrounds the actual relations of power based on brokerage and patronage and socialised through elite bargains within the state's institutional framework. After all political settlements are about balance of power and distribution of rents/resources among contending elites (see chapter 2).

Warlord democratization[53] was an uneven process – senior leaders of jihadi factions were absorbed into key ministries and provincial strongmen captured provincial power structures. Many mid and low level fighters were not integrated into the provincial security apparatus or national police (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014, 6)[54] – they either joined military-patrimonial networks operating outside state structures and controlled by local strongmen like Mir Alam's in Kunduz (chapter 8) or joined the insurgency as Hizb-e-Islami fighters did in Baghlan (chapter 7). Some of these same groups later emerged as anti-Taliban militias known as arbaki that later transitioned to ALP. Lacking a stable resource base, Mir Alam's militias essentially lived off the land; part of a local conflict

[52] It's important to differentiate between patrimonialism, neo-patrimonialism and military patrimonialism. Patrimonialism referred to the traditional form of governance in which sovereignty resided in one person, the king or prince (Weber 1954). Neopatrimonialism refers to situations when bureaucratic institutions developed alongside patrimonial practices. A neo-patrimonial state is defined 'by the appropriation of the partially institutionalised political centre by a group essentially orientated towards the maintenance of its own power' (Dorronsoro 2005, 25–33). Military patrimonialism is defined as the ability of military leaders or warlords who in addition to military skills necessary to win battles must also be able to maintain a following of armed men – essentially in non-bureaucratic polities. It referred to the control exercised by the military leader over armed men and territory (Giustozzi 2009b, 8).

[53] Warlord democratisation refers to the attempt to co-opt warlords into state structures (B. R. Rubin 2006).

[54] This was mainly because there were too many local armed groups – in chapter 8 I show that in Khanabad district there were an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 militiamen compared to 30 to 50 policemen in most districts.

economy involving forced taxation, looting, land grabbing and drug running. Abusive local commanders belonging to Mir Alam's military networks like Nawidak and Qadirak were particularly notorious for oppressing the local population, mostly the Pashtuns in central Kunduz and Khanabad districts (HRW 2011; Cecchinel 2014b; Bleuer and Ali 2014).

The underlying structural conditions are central to understanding the continued persistence of local militias documented in the empirical chapters. Despite security sector reform, aimed at disarming local militias and building professional security forces - the army and police - among other things, the social relations and the actors that made up the broader security architecture did not change, instead it consolidated over time (Sedra 2006; Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013; Giustozzi 2012). As discussed above, after Northern Alliance powerbrokers integrated their militias into state structures the logic of military-patrimonialism helped to sustain the relations of interdependency and reciprocity between foot soldiers, militia commanders, regional strongmen and powerbrokers in Kabul. This system with roots in the battlefield alliances of 2001 gradually got entrenched under continued US military patronage to Afghan regular and irregular forces throughout the decade. As the insurgency intensified and deficiencies in the regular forces became evident, NATO forces turned to local militias as a compensatory measure, reinforcing the logic of the underlying structural conditions. It created the 'conditions of possibility' for local strongmen to rejuvenate their commander-networks and retain militias. This in essence was the emergent political order that I will explore in detail through the provincial cases in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

As previously mentioned, the dominance of strongmen in the provinces was perceived as an obstacle to statebuilding. However, brokerage and patronage politics entailed considerable advantages over confronting warlord power directly. Integrating militias into the state structures was the most effective way of buying off armed factions and ensuring a level of order and stability. In empowering local strongmen like Atta to facilitate local control, the central government managed to consolidate its authority in the provinces (Mukhopadhyay 2014). In this way President Karzai gradually consolidated, although not everywhere and evenly, the new political settlement and expanded central government power to the sub-national level by co-opting local and regional powerbrokers

to join the 'elite bargain'. He formalised, through appointments to state positions as in the case of Atta, privileged access to domestic as well as foreign political and economic resources, which were regularly manipulated to balance various centres of power. In this mutually interdependent patrimonial order the president, his deputies and powerful warlords in the cabinet and parliament depended on local strongmen for mobilising support and extracting or allocating resources, especially during elections. In exchange for mobilising support, local powerbrokers received the support of individual network leaders within the coalition of elites in the central government to gain access to state patronage and foreign aid and maintain their positions. The stability of the regime therefore depended on the central ruler's (and by extension the different network leaders') ability to act as the pre-eminent player and distributor of patronage and the local powerbrokers' ability to maintain their local powerbases.[55] The one reinforced the other. As I show below, it was not always possible for President Karzai to play the role of the pre-eminent patron due to the US military's role in patronising local power brokers.

Effective control was not always possible because not all resources flowed through the centre to allow Karzai to fully centralise the patronage flow. In insecure areas local powerbrokers directly benefited from US military contracts for supply of logistics, private security companies and anti-Taliban militias. The US military's relationships with local commanders, despite restrictions imposed by the central government, such as banning private security companies and local militias outside government control, continued to hinder President Karzai's attempts to exert greater control over local armed groups and patronage flows (chapter 6 & 8). This also relates to the limitation of North et al.'s *limited access orders* model (chapter 2) in terms of its neglect of transnational resources and regimes of power: the US military's dealings with local militias hindered Karzai's ability to centralise control and effectively govern the 'dominant coalition' – which is why he began to assert his authority more forcefully, eventually leading to the 'nationalisation of local militias' through the ALP. This attempt at controlling local

[55] This dynamic relates to Barkey's 'hub and spoke system'. The spokes will engage with the hub so long as it commands sufficient coercive and monetary resources (Barkey 1994). I thank Jonathan Goodhand for drawing my attention to this.

armed groups and the patronage flow was meant to preserve the 'elite bargain' and the privileges of the ruling elites (see below).

Initially perceived as a weak and isolated leader surrounded by powerful warlords and heavily dependent on foreign support, Karzai gradually shed this image and consolidated a substantial powerbase of his own in the country. The 2004 constitution mandated a centralised presidential system and a bicameral parliament. The presidential system was adopted because the majority of the Pashtun delegates in the Constitutional Loya Jirga voted in favour of it even though non-Pashtun groups (Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara) supported a parliamentary system (B. R. Rubin 2004, 12). Washington also preferred to deal with a strong president, one over which they hoped to have influence rather than a fractious parliament made up of hundreds of powerbrokers (Suhrke 2011b, 163). The new constitution envisaged strong presidential powers, notably full powers to appoint a cabinet and all other senior government officials (down to the level of provincial heads of ministry departments and district governors). Appointments to these positions typically followed the dominant logic of patronage politics, which have traditionally guided senior appointments (van Bijlert 2009, 1). Even if some ministries were subject to meritocratic reforms, including Finance and Rural Development, in other 'power ministries' (defence, interior) government and donor reforms were generally resisted by powerful politico-military networks. Ministerial and senior sub-national positions have often been the object of horse-trading during times of elections to win the cooperation of local powerbrokers in favour of a presidential candidate. The creation, in 2007, of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), given powers to suggest candidates to the president for appointment to sub-national administration did not, as intended by donors, lead to merit-based appointments. On the contrary, the IDLG whose director was a political appointee, directly chosen by the president without the need for parliamentary approval further entrenched the logic of patronage-based appointments in the sub-national administration. Such practices have added currency to the notion of a 'government of relationships' (Nixon 2008, 15) – one where political alliances were forged based on family, business or factional or ethnic affiliations.

Karzai's position as a powerful political force was demonstrated most clearly in 2009 when he secured a second presidential term in an election marred by large-scale fraud and

insecurity. The image of a 'savvy and sophisticated politician' had been reinforced by his ability to forge controversial deals and shrewd political and commercial alliances with local and regional powerbrokers,[56] which yielded him the national platform and electoral strength to overpower his opponents. Karzai boosted his chances of re-election by dividing and weakening his likely challengers in the presidential race, making sure many of these figures, already fragmented because of long term rivalries, did not unite behind one powerful candidate by offering them senior positions in the government if they switched sides. He chose his former defence minister, Fahim Qasim as first vice president and retained Karim Khalili, a Hazara leader of Hizb-e-Wahdat as his second deputy. Karzai's choice of Fahim was a controversial move as the latter was unpopular in Western diplomatic circles and a broad section of Afghan society. However, Fahim's selection demonstrated Karzai's ability to withstand international pressure and secured the political loyalty of a potential supporter of Abdullah, his main political rival in the 2009 election. It also kept the broader opposition, dominated by Tajik and Panjshiri powerbrokers, divided. Fahim controlled vast economic resources, including commercial stakes in Kabul Bank[57] and was a major financial contributor to Karzai re-election campaign (Humayoon 2010). It later emerged that nearly nine hundred millions dollars had been loaned to twelve shareholders of the bank, including President Karzai and Fahim's brothers, causing the bank's collapse. The ensuing government bailout cost the Afghan treasury $825 million. The 2009 election showed that Afghan powerbrokers have a much greater reach beyond Kabul than was generally recognised. Their influence 'exists through personal, commercial, family, and political networks' (ibid 2010, 7).

The election demonstrated that despite the souring of relations with the US government, and frequent attempts to portray him as weak and indecisive, President Karzai was the dominant player in Afghan domestic politics. He clearly relied massively on US financial and military support, but this does not mean that he didn't create a great deal of

[56] They included Ismail Khan (Tajik, Jamiat-e-Islami), Abdul Rashid Dostum (Uzbek, Junbish-e-Mili), Mohammad Mohaqiq (Hazara, Hizb-e-Wahdat), Gul Agha Shirzai, governor of Nangarhar, and the Arsala family (Pashtun, members of Jalalabad shura like Haji Din Mohammad and his nephew Haji Zahir).
[57] One of Karzai's brothers also held shares in Kabul Bank pointing to business alliances between the two families, which may have contributed to the political alliance between Karzai and Fahim in lead up to 2009 presidential election.

autonomy for himself. Most of the election deals over the years proved to be short-lived as elections often cut short patronage-based alliances as evidenced by Atta's support of Abdullah in the 2009 election when in 2004 he had secured the northern votes for President Karzai. However, business alliances between President Karzai and Vice President Fahim's families indicated that the elite bargain between the two remained cohesive in spite of rivalry among their respective clients at the local level. It has been noted that elite pacts were shaped by 'the commercial interests of political actors' leading to 'the growing marriage of business and politics and the rise of an ambitious, wealthy, and influential political class' (Humayoon 2010). The political alliance between Karzai and Fahim is one such example. It played a crucial role in stabilising the otherwise tense relations between the north and the south of Afghanistan (Aikins 2012, 4).

Patron-client relations helped to mediate centre-periphery relationships between the dominant politico-military networks in Kabul and their clienteles in the provinces. In Kunduz for example clientelist relations helped to some extent to discipline local armed groups and consolidated central power in the province as explored further in chapter 8 – which does not mean that turf battles between rival commanders completely disappeared – struggles for power in Khanabad and other parts of Kunduz are frequently reported (Bleuer and Ali 2014). Vice president Fahim and warlord-turned-parliamentarian Abdul rab-Rasoul Sayyaf lent political and military support to their respective clients in Kunduz – commander Mir Alam and Mohammad Omar in Khanabad district. Reliance on patron-client relations and indirect rule in which local powerbrokers served as agents, brokers and middlemen gained prominence by mid-decade as the central government (and NATO forces) came to increasingly rely upon militia commanders in an attempt to defeat the insurgency and reassert central government authority. It is worth noting that in the initial years of the intervention before the onset of insurgency some attempts had been made to lessen reliance on local powerbrokers through security sector reforms in the army, police and local administration.

In a broader sense the 2001 Bonn political settlement was essentially a 'rented peace', the result of controversial bargains with jihadi leaders and mujahedin commanders who fell on the right side of the war on terror (Sharan 2013a, 338). The relative stability of the post-Bonn political order was fundamentally underpinned by the political economies and

resource flows of Western donors. At the heart of it was the nexus between international money – largely in the form of military and development spending - and Afghan politics (Aikins 2012, 4). The Afghan government's dependency on foreign military and financial patronage gradually increased as the international engagement deepened from mid-decade onwards. In particular, the international military and development spending dramatically increased from 2009 onward, corresponding to the 'surge' of NATO troops in support of counterinsurgency operations. Between 2002 and 2013 the US spending on the war crossed the $500 billion mark.[58] This vast amount of spending played a crucial role in solidifying political alliances and the system of military-patrimonialism that had emerged on the battlefield in 2001.[59] The rentier state dynamics further entrenched the logic of patrimonial rule. The flow of external resources allowed President Karzai to gather around him powerful constituencies, who would otherwise have remained fragmented, and subordinate them to the central government using a kingly-style of rule in the tradition of Afghanistan's previous 'patrimonial kings' (Barfield 2010, 134).

However, at the beginning of the next decade the Afghan state's rentier dynamics became a major point of concern as eventual withdrawal of foreign troops and money started to loom larger, bringing into sharp relief the question of long-term sustainability. The nexus of international capital and Afghan politics have been crucial to political alliances between seemingly opposed centres of power. Reductions in international patronage could negatively affect the elite settlement underpinning the post-2001 political order. Stability in Afghanistan, it has been argued, may not depend so much on implementing liberal reforms and institution-building measured in terms of the strength of ANSF and the effectiveness of the bureaucracy, for example. It would rather depend on a political

[58] According to estimates, total direct US spending on the war, including reconstruction aid between 2001 and 2013 reached $641.7 billion. In the 2012-2013 fiscal year war related spending by the US government amounted to $198.2 billion (Cordesman 2012, 3). Another source estimated that the total American reconstruction aid to Afghanistan was nearly $104 billion, more than the money the US invested in the Marshal Plan for Europe after WW-II (Groll 2014). The US spending watchdog SIGAR reported that the US financed in excess of 60% of the Afghan government budget in 2013, as well as countless reconstruction programmes that operated off-budget. In 2013 government revenues were only about $2 billion while its overall budget expenditure was $5.4 billion; the difference was paid for by donors (SIGAR 2014, 3).

[59] Foreign spending was mainly channelled through military and development contracts often awarded to local powerbrokers, which in addition to their coercive power also entrenched their economic power.

settlement that guarantees the monopolies and privileges of the ruling elite which are largely derived from the international war-and-aid economy (Aikins 2012, 3). Contemporary debates on governance in Afghanistan revolve around the contending vision of reforms to foster formal institutions of the state (such as a centralised military and police force) and reliance on brokerage and patronage-based politics in order to sustain stable patrimonial inter-dependencies between contending elite groups and ensure stability. As noted in previous chapters, these are not new debates. The apparent incompatibility between bureaucratic rule and patrimonial practices (Nixon 2008; Giustozzi and Orsini 2009; van Bijlert 2009) does not necessarily mean that the two modalities of governance are mutually exclusive. They can be (and indeed have been) mutually constitutive as attested by the historical co-existence of state institutions and patrimonial practices in Afghanistan (Dorronsoro 2005). In fact patrimonial practices have endowed greater centralisation of power in some instances (Elias 1982; Ghani 1982).

IV. Taliban insurgency

By mid-decade a national insurgency led by the Taliban emerged as a serious obstacle to the consolidation of state power. Attacks against US forces and their Afghan allies and civilians associated with the foreign presence had sharply increased already in late 2003. The stated aim of the insurgents was to prevent the internationally assisted reconstruction of the central state and expel foreign forces from Afghanistan. There was slow recognition that the Taliban had regrouped across the border in Pakistan and re-established influence inside Afghanistan. By the time of the 2004 presidential election, the insurgency had taken firm roots in the south and east of the country.

The US military attributed the rising levels of violence to an indigenous, local insurgency, an armed uprising against a corrupt and predatory government headed by President Karzai. By contrast, President Karzai and many ordinary Afghans saw the Taliban insurgency as a 'Made in Pakistan' militancy exported from Islamabad but clothed in local garb as a Pashtun uprising against the Northern Alliance dominated government in Kabul (Eikenberry 2013). Karzai has repeatedly accused Pakistan and its

military intelligence organisation, the ISI, of providing sanctuaries, training facilities as well as financial and military supplies to Afghan insurgents based in Pakistan to wage a proxy war against the Afghan government and foreign forces inside Afghanistan.[60] Yet, US and NATO forces continued their military operations against insurgents inside Afghan villages, much to the consternation of President Karzai, while insurgent sanctuaries and training facilities across the border remained operational.

The US military began to rethink its military strategy, until then exclusively focused on hunting Al Qaeda terrorists and pursuing the remnants of the Taliban. General David Barno, the commander of US forces in Afghanistan (2003-2005) added a 'people-centric' counterinsurgency element to the military mission, aimed at 'winning hearts and minds' of the population (Suhrke 2011b, 62). This early attempt at counterinsurgency was to serve as a model for Gen. Stanley McChrystal to implement a more ambitious and far-reaching 'population-centric' counterinsurgency campaign coupled with the 'surge' of US and NATO troops in 2009. While US commanders pursued a long and costly counterinsurgency campaign in the Afghan countryside, which they argued was necessary to defeat Al Qaeda in the region and contain the Taliban, President Karzai pleaded for US military operations inside Pakistan to dismantle insurgent sanctuaries and their training facilities. He insisted that Al Qaeda was driven out of Afghanistan in 2001 and no longer had any bases inside the country, and the war against terrorism inside Afghan villages and in the Afghan countryside made very little sense (Hakim 2013). He also became increasingly frustrated when he realised the Americans were not prepared to attack the Afghan Taliban inside Pakistan. As a result he became more critical of U.S. military operations, particularly air strikes and night raids that caused a rising tide of civilian casualties. These disagreements between Karzai and US commanders and the Obama administration reflected fundamental differences in worldview and strategic vision between supposed partners in the global War on Terror.

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[60] Interview # 103. In February 2015, Gen. Pervaiz Musharaf, the former Pakistani army chief and president admitted to Pakistan's complicity with the Taliban, arguing that when he was in power Pakistan sought to undermine the government of Hamid Karzai because of its close relations with India (Boone 2015).

Other accounts of the insurgency emphasised the local (as opposed to national or transnational) and personal aspects of this 'intimate war' over the broader ideological motivations of insurgents, including the aim to expel foreign forces from Afghanistan (Martin 2014; Simpson 2012). The binary conception of Afghan government versus Taliban/insurgents was not always apparent in a murky world of competing armed groups jockeying for power and resources. In Helmand, for example, the insurgency was said to be driven by the rather parochial and personal motivations of belligerents, such as conflicts over land, water and drugs as opposed to the broader political and economic considerations of a given side in the conflict (see for example Martin 2014). There is a major conceptual problem with this kind of discursive representation of the Afghan insurgency. Essentially, it conveniently edits out the disruptive role of foreign forces and the influence of military operations, especially night raids and kill-capture operations that targeted Taliban commanders in motivating and catalysing the insurgents. Early overtures of peace from Taliban commanders, as noted by Gopal (2014a), were summarily dismissed by US commanders and their Afghan allies. Karzai's attempts to make peace with the Taliban in 2001 and afterwards were repeatedly scuttled by the US military. After the September 11 attacks in the United States, US forces were given a clear mandate to hunt down and defeat Al Qaeda terrorists and their Taliban hosts. Therefore, following the logic of the War on Terror, the US military had little incentive to wind down the war and negotiate peace with Taliban commanders in 2001 (Dam 2014b).

As it happened, persecution by government officials and assassination and detention of Taliban leaders by US/NATO forces was a major factor in galvanizing the insurgency (van Linschoten and Kuehn 2012; Giustozzi 2009a). As a result, demobilised Taliban fighters once again picked up arms to defend themselves against punitive raids by US forces and the militias of their Afghan allies (Dam 2014a). The claim that foreign forces were protecting the population from Taliban insurgents, a major tenet of the US population-centric counterinsurgency, meant little to those Afghans who were subjected to abusive treatment by government and foreign forces, causing them to join the insurgency. Foreign forces frequently found themselves being manipulated by local powerbrokers in supporting their side in long-standing inter-tribal or factional conflicts.

Labelling a local rival as 'Taliban' was enough to get the Americans or NATO forces to launch a military operation (see Gant 2009).

Between 2006 and 2008 the conflict in Afghanistan passed a watershed. The escalation of Taliban insurgency was met by increased ground operations and aggressive use of air power by NATO forces, marking a clear departure from previous 'people-centric' counterinsurgency (Barno 2007). Because of dwindling political support for the war, the US and its allies wanted to minimise causalities among their troops. Still lacking a sufficiently large number of ground forces (the US had around 20,000 troops in 2006-07)[61] and to minimize the cost of their engagement, foreign forces adopted more stringent 'force protection' measure which included greater reliance on air power. Heavy reliance on air power meant that civilian casualties started mounting and President Karzai's criticism of NATO military operations began to strain his relations with Washington. As the insurgents intensified their attacks in the south and east, the Afghan government faced pressure from rural communities, demanding greater security in border areas. Relations with NATO troop contributing countries like Britain and the Netherlands also deteriorated following the deployment of their troops to Helmand and Uruzgan respectively. Both provinces held strategic value for Karzai and the local powerbrokers, Sher Mohammad Akhundzada in Helmand and Jan Mohammad Khan in Uruzgan, on whom he relied for his power in southern Afghanistan. Both men served as Karzai's trusted governors but were sidelined by the arriving troop-contributing countries. Karzai opposed the British and Dutch decision to remove the two governors, citing concerns over worsening security if they were removed, but was unable to stop it. He resented the tendency of NATO countries, especially the US to override his decisions and infringe upon the country's sovereignty.

As the security situation deteriorated in both provinces, Karzai blamed the British and the Dutch for this situation and accused them of incompetence. Karzai's stance was to some extent vindicated by Martin's account of the conflict in Helmand, which criticised the British military for the rushed dismissal of a powerful local strongman like Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, even though the American military continued to deal with him

[61] See Suhrke (2011b, 43).

when the US Marines arrived there to take over combat operations from the British in 2009 (Martin 2014). The security situation continued in a downward spiral and in 2008 the insurgency was spreading from the south and east to other parts of the country, notably central and northern Afghanistan. The US military's own assessment in 2008 concluded that the Taliban had coalesced into a resilient and evolving insurgency (U.S. Department of Defense 2008, 6). A year later the situation had deteriorated further, including in the environs of Kabul. Wardak province, a mere 35km distance west of the capital had become a hotbed of the insurgency (chapter 6). Insurgent attacks against coalition and Afghan forces and government officials continued to rise. Civilian casualties, primarily from NATO air strikes also climbed up: in the summer of 2008 a NATO air strike killed some 90 people in the Azizabad village of Shindand district, Herat province. President Karzai publicly and angrily criticised the incident, which NATO initially disputed in terms of the number of people killed. As he explained in an interview, the Azizabad incident was a turning point in his government's relationship with the US. Karzai claimed that the US government pressured him into silence, further straining relations between the two countries.[62] It was around this time (2008-09) that the US military and local powerbrokers began to arm local militias in an attempt to respond to the Taliban insurgency.

V. American counterinsurgency

When the Obama administration took power in 2009, Afghanistan and the war there became the administration's key foreign policy priority. President Obama described the Afghan war as 'the good war'. In the summer of 2009 the newly appointed ISAF commander, Gen. McChrystal undertook an assessment of the NATO military mission. His report drew a bleak picture of the overall situation: NATO faced a resilient and growing insurgency; Afghans lacked confidence in their government and the international community; and uncertainty about the future and the limited resolve of the US and its coalition partners meant that Afghans remained uncommitted and continually hedged

[62] Interview # 103.

their bets. Widespread corruption in the Afghan government, the report argued, endangered international efforts to stabilise the country. To turn the situation around, Gen. McChrystal requested more troops and resources from Washington and other NATO allies (McChrystal 2009, 1). He called for the application of an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign focused on protecting the population rather than on seizing territory or destroying insurgent forces. After internal review, the Obama administration set clear goals for the mission in Afghanistan: disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda; reverse the Taliban's momentum and prevent it from overthrowing the Afghan government; and strengthen the capacity of Afghan government and security forces to take over security responsibilities from foreign forces (U.S. Department of Defense 2010, 11). In December 2009, 30,000 additional American troops were ordered to deploy to Afghanistan. The alignment of security and development represented broader support for the military effort to win the war, or at the least sufficiently weakening the Taliban to force them to the negotiating table ahead of troop withdrawal planned for the end of 2014.

Modern counterinsurgency doctrine explicitly drew upon the experience of the late colonial wars of Britain and France, as well as the American war in Vietnam. This colonial model of warfare and policing was rediscovered and reformulated during the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was updated and codified in 2006 in *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24* jointly published by the U.S. Army and Marines Corps. In 2007, Gen. David Petraeus oversaw the implementation of the 'new' counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq. The apparent validation of this doctrine during the 2007 troop surge in Iraq increased its standing and paved the way for the subsequent implementation of counterinsurgency and military surge in Afghanistan in 2009. The key objective of a counterinsurgency campaign has always been to separate the people from the insurgents. Counterinsurgents essentially understood the population as comprising of rational actors able to exercise a clear choice between supporting the insurgents and the government. The main priority was to win the support of the population and thereby cut off the insurgents' access to local recruits and resources on which they may rely to support their military campaign against the government or foreign forces. Classic counterinsurgency doctrine is partly inspired by theories of revolutionary war; the aim is

to deny insurgents popular support and thus make it easier for the government to destroy the enemy. In modern, population-centric counterinsurgency killing the enemy was not the only priority. Instead, it stressed the need to protect the civilian population, eliminate insurgent leaders, establish accountable government and deliver basic services to win hearts and minds of the population. Military commanders and soldiers had to rely less on force and focus more on nation building. *Field Manual 3-24* boldly stated that soldiers and officers had to be 'nation builders as well as warriors' and were expected to re-establish local security forces and government institutions and rebuild critical infrastructure (Army and Marine Corps 2006, Forward).

Insurgency, as defined by U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine 'is an organised, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control'. It is aimed at the overthrow of the government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. A counterinsurgency campaign includes all 'military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency' (ibid 2006, 1). However, the three basic assumptions on which American counterinsurgency have been based all proved problematic in Afghanistan. First, as former US commander and Washington's ambassador to Kabul, Karl Eikenberry argued, protecting the population is a laudable object but protecting it from whom and against what? If it meant coalition forces had to protect the people from Taliban insurgents, what about protection from predatory local police and government officials? What about protection against unemployment when young men without jobs are supposedly susceptible to joining the insurgency? Should protection be provided against illness in the belief that the provision of health care to the population increased the government's legitimacy? The goal of protecting the population proved illusive as reliance on kinetic operations increased, as illustrated by increase in civilian casualties. Second, statebuilding from the outside and by foreign experts did not amount to increased Afghan government capacity and legitimacy. Third, the US and Afghan government's political-military approach to the war was desperately misaligned and in fact pursued opposite ends (see previous section). For example, the US military's involvement in forming local anti-Taliban militias outside central government control frequently led to greater

decentralisation of violence and undermined the Afghan government's attempts to maintain control over local armed groups and hold them accountable. These are formidable challenges that are often simplified into clear and attainable goals in population-centric counterinsurgency discourse (Eikenberry 2013, 61).

At the peak of the COIN-surge campaign when the U.S. had about 100,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan, it cost $100 billion annually, a staggering amount for any government. This level of expenditure directed towards the use of highly trained soldiers as social workers was simply unsustainable over the long term. Meanwhile, calls for negotiating with the Taliban gathered momentum (but which for a long time were opposed by the US), in the belief that there is no military solution to the conflict. However, the deployment of additional troops in 2009 resulted in the escalation of conflict. Increased night raids by Special Forces targeting senior and mid-level Taliban leadership scuttled many attempts to reach a political settlement with the Taliban (Cavendish 2014). And it perversely made negotiations more difficult as they were replaced by younger, more radicalized leaders. The US remained reluctant to agree to a more substantive role for the Afghan government in negotiations with insurgents. The Taliban refusal to directly negotiate with the Afghan government resulted in a number of setbacks, most notably when they opened a diplomatic office in Qatar in the summer of 2013, which was quickly shut down after protests from President Karzai.

With a declared focus on protecting the population, the new counterinsurgency doctrine signified the 'cultural turn' in American counterinsurgency that demanded graduate level knowledge from soldiers and officers (Gregory 2008). The enthusiasts of modern counterinsurgency made frequent references to Lawrence of Arabia to stress the point that counterinsurgency relied upon visionary leaders who understood native societies, while ignoring the uncomfortable fact that Lawrence of Arabia specialised in inciting insurgencies and armed rebellions, not in statebuilding. The mid-twentieth century French counterinsurgency expert, David Galula has left a large imprint on modern counterinsurgency. Galula's writings about counterinsurgency were inspired by his experience as a serving officer in the French army during the Algerian War of independence. France lost that war, but Galula, ironically, went on to advise other Western armies on how to defeat insurgencies. Gen. Petraeus and his cohorts simply

ignored such uncomfortable truths when writing *FM 3-24* and continued to propagate counterinsurgency as the ultimate solution to resolving modern conflicts.

The notion of a kinder, gentler American counterinsurgency (González 2009a), which emerged from the reframing of late-colonial wars of the 1950s and 1960s (such as wars in Indochina and Algeria) was instrumental in changing the way Western military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan have come to be perceived (Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards 2012, 45). Classic counterinsurgency campaigns were designed to control and suppress anti-colonial struggles and independence movements. However, this reframing of the colonial archive presented American counterinsurgency in a gentler perspective. Using metaphors of medical science and therapy, the enemy is characterised as a disease that has infected the body (population) and counterinsurgency as the cure (Bell 2012). Counterinsurgency involved the functional integration of destruction and development, military and civilian efforts and the ambition for lasting transformation of societies designed to legitimate imperial control (Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards 2012, 37). Other metaphors emphasised the progressive aspects of counterinsurgency by labelling it 'armed social work' (Gregory 2008) and the 'graduate level of war' (Nagl 2010) fought by 'warrior-intellectuals' (Miller and Mills 2010) and 'soldier-scholars' (Khalili 2010).

In practice though, military imperatives often override the political and development considerations of modern counterinsurgency. There is considerable violence in recent US counterinsurgency campaigns as reflected in torture and death squad activities and high levels of civilian casualties in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Khalili 2012; Maass 2005; UNAMA and UNOHCHR 2013b; Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). The kill and capture operations carried out by US Special Forces involved air strikes and targeted assassinations aimed at Taliban commanders that also resulted in civilian casualties. For instance, in Wardak province (chapter 6), aggressive counterinsurgency operations by US Special Forces in the winter and spring of 2012-13 reportedly resulted in widespread intimidation of civilians, torture of prisoners, the killing of about a dozen people and the displacement of hundreds of civilians (Aikins 2013).

VI. The emergence of the Afghan Local Police

Shifting security and policing terrain

From mid-decade onward the US government increased its involvement in the international statebuilding project in Afghanistan. The rebuilding of state institutions, reconstruction, good governance and security sector reform, all part of attempts aimed at the transformation of the state and society came to be seen as the vehicle for stabilisation and countering the insurgency, building international and domestic legitimacy and eventually the withdrawal of international forces.[63] The shift in military doctrine and the rise of counterinsurgency resulted in the expansion of troop numbers and financial resources in the hope of improving the worsening situation.[64] Progressively the military came to dominate the overall scope and direction of the intervention. The counterinsurgency campaign solidified the military's role in paramilitarising the police. Interventions in the security sector focused not only on disarming factional militias and rebuilding the national army and police, but progressively shifted towards the 'local' and 'traditional' terrain and quick impact stabilisation measures as foreign forces increasingly linked the success of military operations to success in local governance, informal justice and the establishment of local defence forces (Wimpelmann 2013; Hakimi 2013). Western efforts to regulate the security sector were thus contradictory. On the one hand, interventions were directed towards bureaucratising coercion, by building up a monopoly of the means of violence through security sector reform and rebuilding ANA and ANP (Sedra 2003; Sedra 2006). On the other hand, foreign forces continued to rely on the coercive power of local powerbrokers and from 2006 onwards created irregular armed groups, local militias and private security companies, initially in the south and east of the country (Giustozzi 2008; Barfield 2010, 314; Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). The twin objectives of disarming combatants and rebuilding a credible security sector proved unrealistic, as it would have meant transforming a complex political economy produced

[63] Some of the material on which the following sections are based have featured in Hakimi, Aziz (2013) and Goodhand and Hakimi (2014).
[64] See Suhrke on 'critical mass' doctrine (Suhrke 2011b).

by decades of violent conflict. Warlords and commanders had few incentives to dismantle the very system of social reproduction that had kept them in power.

When the insurgency surfaced in the south around mid-decade, the situation resembled the Taliban position there in the mid-1990s (Dorronsoro 2005, 331). Although the Western response gradually picked up, the Taliban insurgency continued to spread out from the east and south to central and northern areas of the country. There were about 150,000 US and NATO troops in Afghanistan during the height of the military surge in 2010-11.[65] Alongside this massive international troop presence, the Afghan security forces, army and police continued to grow in strength. From the mid-decade onwards the Americans increased their investment in rebuilding the national army and police force. By December 2012, ANSF had reached the agreed target of 352,000 personnel (195,000 ANA and 157,000 ANP). The increase in the number of army and police reflected the worsening security situation. In 2006 the London Conference produced the Afghanistan Compact, a successor international agreement to the Bonn Agreement of 2001.[66] Western donors had pledged to expand the ANA to 70,000 and the ANP to 62,000 personnel. In 2008, the government and donors agreed to increase the size of the ANA from 80,000 to 134,000. The ANP also expanded to 82,000 personnel. In June 2011, the government approved an increase in ANSF end-strength from 305,600 (171,600 ANA and 134,000 ANP) to 352,000 (195,000 ANA and 157,000 ANP) (U.S. Department of Defense 2011, 4). At the end of 2010 the size of ANA had reached to 140,000. By December 2012, the ANA had expanded to 195,000 and the ANP had about 157,000 personnel (U.S. Department of Defense 2012, 16).

Similarly, the size of the ANP rapidly expanded after the US military took over police training in 2005. The involvement of the military greatly paramilitarised the police force to support counterinsurgency operations. In remote districts the police took the brunt of insurgent attacks, partly because the police were lightly armed and therefore easier to attack compared to the heavily armed national army. The police often lacked sufficient

[65] Under President Obama's 'surge' plan the US government withdrew 10,000 troops at the end of 2011 and 23,000 more in the summer of 2012. The remaining troops were scheduled to withdraw by end of 2014.
[66] The Afghanistan Compact lay out a set of political, economic and security benchmarks to be met in the succeeding five years and had been agreed between the international community and the Afghan government.

personnel in insecure districts. In Kunduz province (chapter 8) there were between thirty to forty policemen in some of the insecure districts. There was limited and muddled investment in policing in the early years of the intervention (Wilder 2007; Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013). As the insurgency grew stronger the need for additional police became obvious, and the ANP continued to expand in size paralleling the rapid growth of the ANA. The ANP had grown to 148,500 personnel in February 2013 (Planty and Perito 2013, 1).[67] Between 2001 and 2011 international donors had spent over $15 billion on the Afghan police. The US was primarily focused on the paramilitary dimensions of policing; the main goal was to fight off organised armed challenges to state power as stipulated by counterinsurgency doctrine. This emphasis on training and employing the police in offensive counterinsurgency roles reflected the institutional preferences of the US Department of Defence, which had primary responsibility for police assistance (Rosenau 2008, 10; Perito 2009, 5). This in effect undermined the UN and European efforts in civilianising the national police (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). Between 2005 and February 2013, the US was the largest donor to policing in Afghanistan. It spent some $14 billion to train and equip the ANP (Planty and Perito 2013). Restructuring the ANP achieved mixed success after a decade of donor assistance and governmental reforms. In most parts of the country the ANP 'was still more like a fragmented coterie of militias than either a paramilitary police or a civilian police force' (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011:18).

The broader structures that sustained armed groups has remained resilient (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013; Aikins 2012). The decentralisation of the means of coercion and remobilisation of local armed groups accelerated ahead of the withdrawal of foreign forces in 2014. In the summer of 2010 Gen. Petraeus took over the command of US and NATO forces from Gen. McChrystal. Afterwards, greater emphasis was placed on counter terrorism operations such as night raids aimed at Taliban commanders to

[67] The ANP is composed of; the Afghan Uniform Police (AUP) which has 90,500 members and is responsible for core policing functions; the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), an elite constabulary of 14,400 personnel; the Afghan Border Police (ABP) with 20,000 personnel and responsible for security at airports, land entry points and border security zones; the Afghan Anti-Crime Police (AACP) with 3,400 personnel and responsible for the investigative and intelligence capacities of the ANP nationwide (Planty and Perito 2013, 4).

sufficiently weaken the insurgents in preparation for transitioning security responsibilities to Afghan forces. This was reflected in increased reliance on night raids, aerial bombardment and the deployment of drones and support to local militias. As a result, the war in Afghanistan increasingly resembled the dirty wars[68] in Latin America from the 1960s to the 1980s, and recently in Iraq after the US invasion. The brutality of this kind of war has increased insecurity for all sides in the conflict, which in turn justified the arming of local militias by US Special Forces, the Afghan government and local and regional strongmen. The insurgency has also been radicalised in the process as reflected in the growing reliance on deadly tactics of asymmetrical warfare, such as assassination of tribal leaders and government employees, suicide bombings and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by insurgents (UNAMA and UNOHCHR 2013b).

NATO and government-backed militias

Despite repeated requests from President Karzai, the Americans showed little interest in rebuilding a professional army and police force before the full-blown onset of the insurgency.[69] Initially, the US military was given responsibility for rebuilding the ANA and the Germans for the police. From 2005 onwards, the US military also took over the training of the police, which until then had progressed slowly, mainly because the German focused their efforts on rebuilding the capacity of the National Police Academy in Kabul to train police officers, who could carry out rule of law duties as opposed to paramilitary and fighting insurgents (Murray 2007). Although the Americans made progress in rebuilding the army – at least in terms of numbers, they trained it for the wrong model of war; ANA was trained as a conventional army which was then deployed to conduct a counterinsurgency war (Giustozzi 2012). The ANP remained a fragmented force essentially made up of local militias linked to local strongmen 'than either a paramilitary police or a civilian police force' (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011:18).

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[68] See Jon Boone and Julius Cavendish on the brutalisation of the war (Boone 2011; Cavendish 2011). On the transfer of paramilitary tactics from dirty wars in Latin America to Iraq see (Maass 2005).
[69] Interview # 103.

Before the ANA and ANP assumed responsibility for fighting insurgents, the government and NATO forces relied on existing anti-Taliban armed groups and later established local militias as the Americans began to do after 2006. The first joint US-Afghan government initiative to establish local militias was the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) programme in 2006. It was followed, two years later, by the Afghan Public Protection Programme-AP3. After a brief experimentation with the AP3 model in Wardak, in mid-2009 the US military launched the Community Defence/Local Defence Initiative (CDI/LDI) in the south and east of the country.[70] Some militias were locally initiated, sometimes spontaneously by provincial governors, regional strongmen and local communities as the growth of the insurgency increased the demand for paramilitary policing, particularly in the north. Others were pushed from the centre or the provinces by foreign forces. The management of the various militia groups was located in different parts of the Afghan government (although often they had closer relationships with foreign forces than with the government), including the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Properties and Highways by Tribal Support, Ministry of Interior, President's Office, and National Directorate of Security (NDS). The rationale for their formation was linked to a range of tactical and strategic objectives, including fighting the Taliban, winning election campaigns, strengthening local powerbases, pursuing local vendettas, strengthening the central government or promoting Taliban reintegration.

In 2005, local communities from southern and eastern Afghanistan had requested the central government to deploy additional police along the border with Pakistan to stem the tide of infiltration by insurgents and improve security in those areas. At the time, the Afghan government requested a quick expansion of the national police force, the ANP but US and NATO officials refused to support the plan. The US military, as noted earlier, had just begun training a new army and police force; the regular forces were few and lacked the capacity to police a long and porous border such as the Durand Line. The response led President Karzai

[70] For a discussion of CDI/LDI militias, see (Lefèvre 2010; Jones 2012). It is worth noting that the AP3 was followed by a succession of other local militias, including CDI/LDI, CIP, ISCI, CBSS. In addition, a number of CIA and US special forces funded terrorist pursuit teams such as the Kandahar Strike Force and the Khost Protection Force and up to 70,000 private security guards joined the ranks of local militias (Aikins 2012, 5).

to propose the idea of employing a community or local police force modeled on the *arbaki*[71] concept, but the U.S. did not support it at the time.[72] The Afghan government lacked its own resources to create an *arbaki* force. A proposal by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown in December 2007 to increase support for community defence initiatives modeled on the *arbaki* tribal militias elicited a similar response from US military commanders in Afghanistan. For example, in January 2008 the commander of NATO forces Gen. Dan McNeill described the British proposal as potentially disastrous, arguing that 'what we should not do is take actions that will reintroduce militias of the former power brokers' (cited in Bruno 2008). His successor Gen. David D. McKiernan also cautioned against arming tribal militias and providing support to warlords.

However, as the situation deteriorated the US military leaders changed their minds, notably after Gen. Petraeus became the head of the US Central Command in 2008. In October 2008 the US secretary of defence Robert Gates argued that 'at the end of the day the only solution in Afghanistan is to work with the tribes and provincial leaders in terms of trying to create a backlash ... against the Taliban' (ibid). As the insurgency expanded and changed tactics to target major population centres, the regular police were increasingly deployed to either protect urban centres or to fight in operations alongside or backing up the ANA and foreign forces. Consequently the police were taking heavy casualties, an estimated twice as many as the ANA. Furthermore, attrition rates for the ANP have remained at an annual rate of 25% overall (Planty and Perito 2013, 5). One of the rationales for militia programmes such as the AP3 and Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) was to free the regular police force from protecting highways and government installations and officials and return them to civilian policing and rule of law duties. Over the next few years, the formation of local militias steadily increased.

The first such joint US-Afghan initiative was the ANAP programme (Jones 2012). The plan, approved in February 2006 provided for the recruitment of 11,271 men from 124 high-risk districts in 21 provinces, involving an additional 200-400 police per district. By July 2007 some 8,300 ANAP members had received training in Helmand, Zabul,

[71] For positive analysis of the arbaki tribal security system, see (Osman 2008). See FN #2 for a more recent and critical treatment of the arbaki concept.
[72] Interview # 103.

Kandahar, Farah, Uruzgan and Ghazni, eventually reaching a total strength of 9,000 men. ANAP was managed by Ministry of Interior in collaboration with the US military command in Afghanistan. The force was widely criticised for empowering provincial powerbrokers and their private militias and many of its participants were thought to be Taliban infiltrators (Perito 2009, 9). ANAP was disbanded in May 2008. The second major initiative involving the formation of local militias resulted in the AP3 in Wardak, for which the preparatory work had begun in October 2008. Four strategic districts were chosen in the pilot phase to recruit between 100-200 local fighters per district for a total of 1200 in the entire province (chapter 6).

In March 2009, around the same time as AP3 was being rolled out in Jalrez district, Wardak province, US commanders were exploring another option to establish smaller local militia units in the south and east of the country. From the outset the AP3 encountered problems in Wardak, which prompted US military commanders to experiment with a more nimble approach to bring about rapid improvements in security. This initiative was called the Local Defence Initiative. Based on lessons from AP3 in Wardak, which was considered too bureaucratic and slow, there was no role envisioned for the Afghan government in the LDI programme. It was an American programme, led by elite troops who were meant to embed themselves within Afghan communities.[73] The LDI's goal was to provide financial and military support to local communities who sought outside assistance against insurgents to form defensive 'neighbourhood watch' type local security forces (cited in Jones 2012, 30). In the east, the US military provided financial and military support to a section of the Shinwari tribe that claimed to fight Taliban insurgents, but which eventually turned out to be an inter-tribal feud between two rival sections of the Shinwari tribes (Foschini 2011). The US military claimed that the LDI model was based on the history of local militias in Afghanistan during its stable periods during the reign of King Zahir Shah (1933-73). In the summer of 2009, Gen. McChrystal backed the LDI programme, which according to Jones was subsequently endorsed by interior minister, Haneef Atmar and defence minister, Rahim Wardak (Jones

[73] Interview # 102.

2012, 31). In August that year, US Special Forces established the first group of LDI militias in the Nili district of Daikundi province.

The LDI proved controversial with Afghan officials and the US political leadership in Kabul. It was never a full-scale programme, but more a 'series of experiments' (Lefevre 2012, 3), which had been tried in Arghandab (Kandahar), Nili (Daikundi), Achin (Nangarhar), Gereshk (Helmand) and parts of Paktia.[74] At the time when implementation began, the LDI lacked the approval of President Karzai (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009b). Since the LDI programme lacked the government's backing, the minister of interior characterised it as 'illegal', a clear violation of a 2009 agreement between the Afghan government and the US military. That agreement had paved the way for the implementation of AP3 in Wardak and included plans for expansion to other provinces, which eventually did not happen.[75]

Nationalising security: the ALP and APPF

In April 2010, while the Afghan government had not yet granted a formal approval, ISAF began a significant expansion of the LDI programme. The Village Stability Operations (VSO) initiative was conceived in order to integrate the governance and development aspects of the US military counterinsurgency strategy with security, as represented by ALP.[76] When Gen. Petraeus took command of ISAF forces in July the same year, he pushed for and succeeded in extracting a formal agreement from President Karzai to expand US military-backed militias. President Karzai initially objected to Gen. Petraeus' proposal to form local self-defence units to fight Taliban insurgents. The president was not necessarily against militias per se; his objection was more closely related to the role

[74] A 2010 strategy paper developed by the ministry of interior and the US military stated that the District Governor will work with the CDC or village shura to select, vet and supervise LDI. Individual payments were set at 50% of ANP. Fighters were expected to bring their own weapons (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014).
[75] Interview # 83, 05.08.2012.
[76] The VSO represented the US military's partnership with the population, focused on improving a. local security through the formation of local militias, b. local governance by supporting community shuras or tribal jirgas, and c. development through the provision of local services by district and provincial administrations. At the same time, the Foreign Internal Defence (FID) mission represented the US military's partnership with the ANSF, involving training and support to the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police (Bolduc 2011, 24–25).

of US Special Forces and ensuring government control and oversight over these forces. One could argue that the fight was over the control of the means of coercion and the flow of patronage. The US military's growing reliance on local armed groups to fight the Taliban and protect NATO bases and supply lines emerged as an obstacle to the stability of patronage networks which President Karzai had developed to accommodate local strongmen and peripheral armed groups, including in state structures, since coming to power in 2001. He had to some extent succeeded in reversing the decentralisation of coercion that resulted from the US military intervention in 2001 (see above). This new round of arming militias outside government control by US forces was the beginning of a series of confrontations between Karzai and the Americans, which in later years escalated to include disagreements over disputed elections, the conduct of night raids, use of air strikes in military operations, detention of Afghan nationals by foreign forces and negotiations with the Taliban. After winning a second term in 2009, President Karzai had pledged to disband private security companies and improve the regulation of local militias.

According to Afghan officials who were involved in the negotiations with the US military over the planned expansion of local militias, they understood Petraeus' proposal to be influenced by his experience with the *Sons of Iraq* programme. His proposal purportedly involved setting up small anti-Taliban local armed groups, paid by the US military to work directly under US Special Forces command without links to any central government institutions – basically free wheeling militias,[77] leading inevitably, Karzai believed, to *militia-sazi*,[78] the undermining of the ANSF and ultimately the 'destruction of the state'.[79] Hence, Karzai refused to sanction Gen. Petraeus' initial plan and insisted on the Afghan government's control of the process. The contestations over the control of local armed groups and the peripheral political economies that emerged as a result of US military patronage to local commanders resulted in government attempts to regularise and assert control over the various militia experiments. Eventually, a compromise solution emerged following tense negotiations between President Karzai and Gen. Petraeus in the

[77] Interview # 47, 10.04.2012.
[78] A Dari term meaning the formation or proliferation of militias.
[79] Interview # 103.

form of the *Afghan Local Police*. The ALP programme, at least in theory, allowed the government to 'nationalise' security and bring US-backed armed groups under the control of the ministry of interior. At the same time private security companies, which employed thousands of local militias to guard US bases and NATO supply lines were also disbanded and replaced with a ministry of interior force.

The ALP enabled the creation of thousands of 'local police' under the command of the ministry of interior and paid for by the US military. The programme was officially authorised in August 2010.[80] Calling the militia members the *Afghan Local Police* was an attempt to 'legitimise what was really a militia programme by calling it 'police' and making it part of the ministry of interior'.[81] As mentioned previously, the rearmament and decentralisation of violence occurred in parallel with attempts to bureaucratise coercion and reconstitute the state's monopoly of the means of violence. In addition to a growing national army and police force, initially a 10,000 strong ALP force (subsequently expanded to 30,000) was agreed in August 2010 to complement the ANSF in insecure districts. Mandated until the end of 2014, the ALP operated in insecure districts with limited or no ISAF and government forces presence. The US military considered the ALP as a cost efficient - ALP cost 40% less in training and equipment than the national police[82] - and militarily effective force to provide security in insecure areas.[83] As I show later, the ALP's effectiveness in battles against insurgents cannot be taken for granted, there were great variations between regions and over time – their casualty numbers were twice that of ANA and in later years when the security responsibilities were transferred from foreign forces to Afghan security forces, the ALP's ineffectiveness in containing the spread of the Taliban, for example in Kunduz, became evident (see chapter 8).[84]

By December 2010 there were 3,000 ALP militiamen in 15 districts and by December 2011 they had increased to 10,000 in 57 districts. With the emergence of a state-sanctioned programme most of the existing militias were gradually incorporated into

[80] Interview # 47, 10.04.2012.
[81] Interview # 96, 06.11.2012.
[82] Interviews # 44 and # 21, 11.02.2012.
[83] Interview # 102.
[84] Security in most parts of Kunduz sharply deteriorated in late 2014, the Taliban advance seemed unstoppable and their influence had once again reached the centre of Kunduz city (Cecchinel 2014b).

ALP, which became a seal of approval to legitimise and 'consolidate all known coalition and Afghan local self-defense force programs' (HRW 2011, 55). In parallel with the development of ALP, the government launched the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) in order to nationalise the many private security companies that protected institutions and infrastructure around the country. APPF was overseen by the ministry of interior and operated under a Presidential decree that disbanded private security providers. The APPF's 14,000 Afghan personnel are a static guard force that protects public buildings, development projects and vital infrastructure (Planty and Perito 2013, 4–5).

The ALP in its final manifestation was a compromise solution. On the one hand, the Afghan government, at least in principle managed to put an end to ad-hoc initiatives such as the LDI and extended its control over the means of coercion by reigning in US military patronage. It was hoped that the government would be able to assert greater control over local militias supported by US Special Forces by subordinating them to the ANP command at the district and provincial levels.[85] On the other hand, it paved the way for the US military to legitimise and expand its existing programme of support to local militias as part of its counterinsurgency strategy. The establishment of ALP and the simultaneous disbandment of private security companies and their replacement by APPF were seen as instruments to assert Afghan sovereignty and centralise the means of coercion - although in practice this proved far more difficult. Minister Atmar characterised this twin initiative as an attempt to 're-nationalise security', firstly by ending the mandate of private security companies and secondly, by reviving and modernising the *arbaki* tribal tradition of local policing, which eventually culminated in the ALP.[86] As evident from his inaugural speech in 2009, President Karzai and the central government sought to regularise and assert control over various militias and the local economies of patronage on which local powerbrokers depended. The political and security framework that emerged as a result of such contestations eventually manifested itself in the

[85] It is worth noting that the CIA and US Special Forces continued to support the creation of local militias outside the ALP framework. Therefore, the agreement that gave birth to the ALP did not necessarily lead to a substantive centralisation of the means of coercion. Interview # 104.
[86] Interview # 83, 05.08.2012.

regulatory structure of the ALP. The ALP, therefore, represented President Karzai's attempts to preserve the elite bargain and the special privileges of the 'privileged insiders', one such privilege being the right to maintain armed groups, and centralise power by clumping down on ad-hoc US-funded local defence and private security initiatives – thus subordinating local commanders to central authority, which as I show in the empirical chapters, remained a partial achievement.

The ALP was the result of a messy compromise that involved bargaining between international actors, national elites and local commanders and regional strongmen. For US Special Forces, the ALP constituted a cost efficient and effective force that countered Taliban penetration in areas with a limited state presence. For those central state elites who supported the programme, it held out the potential to regularise foreign funded experiments in militia formation and by so doing extend their control over the means of coercion and patronage. Other central state elites opposed the programme, as they believed it undermined efforts to build formal state institutions at the centre. For peripheral elites the ALP was another resource flow or source of rent that could be captured to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the central state or competitors in the provinces. However, while national buy-in had been secured, local support for the programme continued to prove elusive, as discussed in the following empirical chapters. Next, I examine the contentious process of arming local militias in Wardak province.

Chapter 6: Getting savages to fight barbarians: counterinsurgency and the remaking of Afghanistan

> *What inspired me was my first rotation here into Afghanistan, where I learned how to use the tribes and other ethnic groups to secure local and rural areas with small numbers of people… I saw the power of this culture in protecting itself at the local level, which I believe is the secret to security in Afghanistan — at the district level and below. You can be very effective, but in a way that is traditional, and congruent with how they have protected themselves for hundreds of years.*

General Donald Bolduc, deputy commander of Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, and known as the godfather of the Afghan Local Police (New York Times, 20 May 2013).

> *We must work first and forever with the tribes, for they are the most important military, political and cultural units in that country. The tribes are self-contained fighting units who will fight to the death for their tribal family's honor and respect.*

Major Jim Gant, Commander of ODA 316, United States Army Special Forces, and author of *A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan: One Tribe at a Time*.

I. Introduction

This chapter examines the turbulent history of the US-backed Afghan Public Protection Programme (AP3) and its later incarnation - the ALP, a pro-government militia supported by the US military in Wardak province.[87] Like its ALP successor, the AP3 had been justified by the Americans, invoking notions of 'local solutions' and 'cost effectiveness', as a politically convenient and culturally appropriate short-term measure to supplement broader efforts to counter the insurgency and build up the regular forces, to be demobilized afterwards. The quotes above are illustrative of views that became increasingly prevalent in US military circles as the US-led war against the Taliban showed, after nearly a decade, few signs of victory. American commanders routinely framed their efforts to arm local militias in the language of 'tradition' and respect for Afghanistan's 'authentic'

[87] Some of the material on which this chapter is based has featured in Hakimi, Aziz (2013).

culture, in particular through the imagery of the tribes fiercely guarding their independence and protecting its members against outside threats. It stemmed from an essentialist approach to culture that was meant to create a 'tribal' backlash against the Taliban. These notions of enduring tribal traditions of self-protection allegedly still practiced by Pashtun tribesmen inside their autonomous, self-governing village enclaves resonated with the well-known writings of Mountstuart Elphinstone, notably *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (Elphinstone 1815). His writings on government and society, which played an essential role in 'tribalising' Afghan historiography, had a profound intellectual influence on the latter generations of colonial chroniclers and Western academics. Modern counterinsurgency doctrine was a derivative of the Western imperial experience of the late-colonial wars and the more recent US military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan (chapter 5). American commanders based their understanding of tribal militias on the US military's experience with local militias in Iraq,[88] as well as the nineteenth century lessons of Britain's colonial management of the Afghan frontier. By reaching backwards and invoking colonial practices, the US military leadership hoped to mobilise the Pashtun tribes against the Taliban by means of the arbaki tradition of local policing. These efforts involved US Special Forces working with local elders and government officials to establish self-defence forces in insecure areas of the country like Wardak. However, in practice it proved rather difficult to revive 'traditions' of self-protection that were mainly based upon an idealized and reified vision of the past.

This chapter highlights the difficulties that the US military encountered in Wardak as local support for arming militias in a province beset with rival armed groups proved elusive and many local villagers were quite unwilling to defend themselves against Taliban insurgents at the behest of American forces. Instead of generating benefits for the wider population, this US-sponsored local defence programme was largely about safeguarding American forces by using local fighters as cost-effective auxiliaries to fight the Taliban. The AP3 and the ALP mainly provided security and financial benefits to local powerbrokers, in particular former jihadi commanders who manipulated the programme to revive their militias and senior government officials who relied on it for

[88] The use of paramilitary militias in Iraq was inspired by US military counterinsurgency experience in El Salvador against left-wing guerrillas (Maass 2005).

their own protection. Pro-government militias in Wardak were also used by US Special Forces for night raids and targeted killings against insurgents, and as such played a limited role in protecting the population. The use of a defensive militia meant to protect the population for combat purposes, sometimes outside their own province, discredited the idea of 'local' defence forces. Wardak became a hornet's nest of factional rivalries between different armed groups. In such a contested environment, the AP3 (and ALP) militias were mainly seen by other armed groups as an American military tool to change the balance of power in favour of the occupying forces and add to their own strength at the expense of rival groups. In this sense, it was an attempt by an imperial power to mobilise tribal peoples (or simply bribing existing armed groups) in the defence of colonialism by 'getting savages to fight barbarians' (Duffield 2005, 141 & 151).

The chapter begins with a critical discussion of essentialised notions pertaining to the Pashtun tribes and the valorisation of tribal traditions and customary actors and institutions. The broader view of the political and security landscape dating back to the Afghan jihad in the 1980s provides the historical context for the examination of local contestations over power after 2001 in Wardak. This sets the stage for a detailed examination of the AP3 programme in this strategically located province close to Kabul. Next, the discussion turns to AP3's transition to ALP, the growing distrust between local commanders, Afghan officials and American commanders amidst escalating insurgent violence. A short ethnographic account of an ALP inauguration ceremony in Sayedabad district demonstrates that the ALP, like its previous iterations has involved a lot of wheeling and dealing and some rather controversial bargains among contending groups benefiting from the programme. Despite references to local ownership and oversight by village elders, these local defence experiments eventually found little buy-in from the population in Wardak, as many elders remained sceptical of local militias. The transition of AP3 to ALP coincided with the final phase of US military engagement in Wardak, a moment to reflect on the final legacy of US forces and the ALP. In the final analysis the case of ALP in Wardak highlighted the real intent and outcome of American counterinsurgency and its militarised vision of statebuilding.

II. Tribes, tradition and indirect rule

The emphasis on respect for local culture and the importance of traditional authorities and informal sources of power in local governance and security arrangements is not unique to Afghanistan. It reflects a wider shift in the literature on peacebuilding and counterinsurgency (chapters 2 & 5). The prominence given to customary institutions and non-state actors has problematised the dominant liberal notions of state sovereignty and monopoly of violence. The celebration of local authority and customary practices is sometimes presented as a radical critique of Western interventionism and imposition of liberal norms and institutions on non-Western and non-liberal societies. Yet, as Duffield reminds us, there are larger interests at play in protecting and cultivating tradition. For example, Elphinstone considered the role of government to consist of preserving the traditional village way of life based on a vision of self-sufficient and self-governing villages. However, later generations of colonial administrators were interested in *controlling* rather than in *documenting* life processes in the colonies (Hopkins 2008, 16–17). Under situations of established colonial rule, 'securing the "traditional" and maintaining its cohesion', Duffield argues 'is essential for defending the "modern"' (Duffield 2005, 148). After all the invention of native traditions served as a precondition for indirect rule. Colonial powers routinely established the credentials of their native allies as 'traditional' and 'authentic' (Mamdani 2012). In the name of preserving tribal traditions, British colonial administrators like Sir Robert Sandeman pioneered the tribal jirga (council of elders) and appointed tribal chiefs, including in non-Pashtun tribes whose authority they reinforced through regular payment of subsidies and handed them the responsibility of policing the Afghan frontier. The internal power dynamics within the tribes irrevocably changed as a result of Sandeman's system of frontier management (Marsden and Hopkins 2011, 49–73).

Holding up 'Rousseau's "savage" or natural man' as 'the epitome of natural self-reliance', Duffield contends that 'self-production, and the natural resilience that this imparts has long been axiomatic for people understood through the register of tradition, simplicity, backwardness and race' (Duffield 2005, 146). He points out that 'native administration', defined as the formalised mechanism of indirect rule in Western colonies was based on the assumption of securing self-reliance among the native population. It

involved devolving partial administrative responsibilities, for example, public works, tax collection, rural courts, local police, and so on to indigenous tribal or feudal authorities to bring about the measured (not full) achievement of self-determination under colonial rule. The 'backward races' were supposed to be empowered 'by their own efforts in their own way', instead of having alien notions (like democracy) imposed on them.[89] Partial self-rule by appointed traditional authorities was supposed to enable native people to withstand the threats and lures of insurgent nationalism and other challenges to the imperial order (ibid 2005, 149–50). This cultivation of self-reliance in native societies by colonial powers, in Duffield's analysis, amounts to 'getting savages to fight barbarians'. The savage is invited to maintain his traditional, self-reliant ways of life and the coherence and continuity of his community as a defence against the barbarians (native nationalists fighting for independence, for example) who threaten the civilised world as a whole. It was a way of mobilising 'traditional' rural populations against the disruptive effects of modern colonial rule. Similar to Duffield's formulation, the ALP claims to improve the self-reliance of local villagers as a defence against Taliban violence. During the ALP inauguration ceremony in Sayedabad (a Hizb stronghold) government officials and US commanders repeatedly urged local villagers to defend society (and the US-installed government) against Taliban 'barbarians' in exchange for development's promise of a better life through government services. The deployment of development resources in order to build local security is central to US counterinsurgency doctrine (Goodhand 2013; Kilcullen 2009; Fishstein and Wilder 2012). Development is seen as a way of driving a wedge between the local population (that needs those services) and the insurgents (who oppose foreign funded development projects). In practice, however, it proved difficult to revive what were perceived to be enduring traditions of self-protection or to deliver 'development' to the local population.

The ALP is an important element of patrimonial rule and the local-global asymmetry of power. It highlighted the desire of today's rulers to revert to the past and reinvent older

[89] Senior American commanders expressed similar views about Afghan 'tribesmen'. According to Bolduc: 'Without imposing a democratic government, we bring democratic principles that appeal to Afghan culture in the rural areas. The principles reflect traditional Afghan and Islamic values associated with the prosperity for their families' (Bolduc 2011, 27).

(partly colonially-inspired) repertoires of political control. This involved reinstating tribal jirgas and establishing arbaki-type tribal militias in insecure rural areas. Modern counterinsurgency shares colonial assumptions about the existence of 'internal self-government' among the tribes (Beattie 2013, 215). British frontier governance was designed to 'put the onus of the maintenance of order on the tribesmen themselves' (Hopkins 2008, 169). Tribal areas under British control were divided into several tribal agencies and a British political agent relied on local *maliks* (tribal chiefs) to ensure law and order. The *maliks* were expected to guarantee good behaviour and peace from the local tribesmen in return for colonial subsidies. This was often difficult in practice and entailed brutal reprisals from the British. This was part of the collective responsibility-and-punishment system, which guided Britain's colonial relations with the local tribes. The appointment of tribal chiefs and payment of subsidies resulted in the imposition of social hierarchies and leadership, which the British concluded was lacking, for instance, among the fractious and egalitarian Masud tribes in Waziristan (Beattie 2013). These activities 'exerted a largely conservative influence, preserving and codifying 'tradition' and 'custom', and 'institutionalized and entrenched power structures within the tribes which otherwise would have been subject to greater challenge' (Hopkins 2008, 29). As I demonstrate below, the US military's efforts in Wardak were similarly conservative and reactionary in nature. Imperial modernity did not seek to integrate, civilise and modernise. Rather it sought to contain, conserve and traditionalise the frontier tribesmen (ibid 2008, 63).

The local governance agenda of some donors and foreign militaries, however, ran counter to the patronage-based centralising tendencies of President Karzai. In fact he manipulated ostensibly decentralising initiatives like the IDLG's sub-national governance programme to limit the devolution of power to the local level. Instead, he attempted to centralise power by incorporating ever-wider circles of local powerbrokers into his patronage network. In Wardak, for example, international resources channelled through IDLG to set up district-level local *shuras* under the Afghan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP) in 2008 and 2009 ended up paying the salaries of local powerbrokers loyal to President Karzai. The unelected district councils were meant to mobilise votes for Karzai in the 2009 presidential election. The contemporary reality of patron-client dynamics is

reflective of previous episodes of centralisation of power. For example, in the eastern part of the country the tribes were mostly the by-product of state policies and part of the central government's apparatus of ruling (Dorronsoro 2012).

Tribalising historiography

Counterinsurgency and development policy literature on Afghanistan frequently re-invent and reify local traditions, including older forms of community policing such as *arbaki*. This is based on orientalist reading of and about tribes and a variety of essentialised notions pertaining to native traditions. Critical literature, on the other hand, tends to problematise the notion of cultural authenticity by highlighting the dynamism, adaptability and fluidity of identity categories (Barth 1969). The shifting identities of Afghan traders engaged in trade with India proved crucial to market transactions and the country's partial integration into the British global capitalist market in the nineteenth century (S. M. Hanifi 2011, 6–30). Likewise, war related displacement and economic migration in the last four decades have generated transnational solidarity ties that shape the lives of those in the frontier regions between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia (Marsden and Hopkins 2011). These examples illustrate the limitations of a purely tribal framework for understanding modern Afghanistan. This prompted Hanifi to suggest a historicised migration-based model that showed the transnational aspects of political and economic reproduction (S. M. Hanifi Forthcoming). The circular-migration theory offers a better understanding of the role of regional patterns of political control, military conscription and warfare, trade relations and resource extraction in the history of Afghan state formation (S. M. Hanifi 2012). It involved conquest, migration and the recycling of Afghan ruling elite between territories encompassing present day Afghanistan and the Safavid, Mughal and Uzbek empires and later British India (chapter 4).

Yet, there is a tendency in colonial ethnography and functional-structuralist anthropology to render the tribe as a distinct and bounded social entity and marker of Pashtun cultural identity. Ibn Khaldun's dichotomous notion of desert and sedentary civilisations pertaining to North African tribes is used to reframe Pashtun society as egalitarian but fractious in nature, with strong kinship bonds of solidarity (asabiya) militating against the

centralisation of power by a central ruler. Egalitarian tribal societies are said to possess strong decentralising tendencies as they typically reject the legitimacy of outside or central authority. The Durrani rulers of Afghanistan managed to centralise power, Barfield argues, by adopting the hierarchical political culture of their former Turko-Mongolian overlords. This involved replacing 'the democratic and federal political institutions commonly used among the Pashtun tribes… with autocracy' (Barfield 2010, 4). Whenever state power grew weak the frontier tribes, organised into segmentary groups living in marginal zones that the state could not administer directly typically rebelled and seized power. The political history of Afghanistan is often conceived in terms of a 'recurrent process of fission and fusion' involving 'the integrating tendency of the state … opposed to the centrifugal forces of the tribes' (Dorronsoro 2005, 7). As a result, relations between tribe and state are commonly framed as an endless tug-of-war resulting in intermittent state collapse and resurgent tribalism. The war between the mujahedin and the Soviet-backed government in the 1980s became the latest example of the tribe-state conflict.

Such a characterisation is based on notions of tribal traditions of autonomy and self-rule, which may have limited relevance considering the fact that the country has been in the midst of a social revolution in the last few decades. Yet, views of Afghanistan as a peripheral and inconsequential territory, inward looking and isolated from global forces,[90] as a tribal domain populated by parochially minded tribesmen and burdened by petty, but timeless local concerns and incapable of operating in any larger national or global framework continues to inform perspectives on the country (See for example Martin 2014). The imageries of timeless native traditions and resilient Pashtun tribes acting according to a rigid ancient code of *Pashtunwali* are clearly influenced by Western orientalism (Gregory 2008, 17). A cursory glance over the region's history, dating back to before the arrival of Islam in the 7th century easily destabilise the understanding of any community as 'being geographically isolated, historically stable, or ethnically homogenous' (S. M. Hanifi Forthcoming).

[90] See Dupree (1973).

Nineteenth century colonial historiography played a formative role in constructing the tribal (Pashtun) view of Afghanistan (Mousavi 1998; Hopkins 2008).[91] By comparing the Pashtun tribes to Highland Scots based on a vision of self-sufficient and self-governing villages, Elphinstone played a pivotal role in 'tribalising' our understanding about Afghan society.[92] His writings became the intellectual foundation for later generations of colonial officials and Western academics, in particular anthropologists (Hopkins 2008, 17). As a result, knowledge about 'Other' cultures became a tool for political control of indigenous society. It resulted in cruder representation of native people in the colonial archive, in particular the imagery of Afghanistan as *yaghistan* (land of 'tribal' rebellion). Almost two centuries later this particular imagery has retained its potency; Afghanistan is treated as a failed state full of warlords, pre-modern tribesmen and global insurgents threatening the civilised world, which in turn justified the presence of foreign forces to keep chaos at bay. Despite the considerable social transformation in the last four decades, particularly the rise to power of a new class of powerbrokers, namely militia commanders and warlords, the legacy of colonial framing of Afghanistan as a tribal society with enduring tendencies of opposition to centralised state has endured.

Critical perspectives on structural-functionalist anthropology challenged the idea of segmentary kinship-based tribal society with strong egalitarian tendencies and internal cohesiveness because of personal ties of solidarity (asabiya) among its members. Tribal society is typically presented as a subsistence economy with low economic stratification, limited wealth differentiation and incapable of producing much surplus to be used to reward followers, engage in patronage politics and centralisation of power. However, this tribal view tends to overlook the historical role of central authority and state subsidies in creating social hierarchies and patterns of leadership among the Pashtun tribes. Ghani (1982) has explained the mechanics of this patrimonial order during the Safavid and Mughal rule over Afghanistan and later under the Durrani Empire (chapter 4). This was part of a brokerage system in which the khans of the Pashtun tribes served as mediators

[91] Early British colonial officials viewed Afghans as noble savages simply lagging behind on the scale of civilization similar to pre-modern Europeans.

[92] The ethnogenesis of Pashtun identity and the 'tribalizing' of Afghan historiography arguably date back to the Mughal court in the early 17th century and reflect the political domination of the region by Mughal rulers in India (Green 2008, 184–85).

between tribe and empire (and between tribe and state). In a more recent treatment, Dorronsoro argues that tribal hierarchies and patterns of leadership, in particular among the eastern Pashtuns emerged as part of state-tribe interaction. The payment of subsidies to tribal leaders ensured their allegiance to the state (Dorronsoro 2012). Government appointed tribal leaders played an important role in extending government control and producing a 'state effect' in the periphery. As a result, in the east of the country the tribes are more appropriately conceived as part of the governing system, as a means to relay state action, instead of viewing them as distinct and bounded entities exterior to or opposed to state structures (ibid 2012).

Such critical insights problematised the application of the concept of tribe to polities with a long history of empire and statebuilding like Afghanistan (Lindisfarne 2013). Sneath, for example, challenged the model of the tribe as existing outside the state and argued instead for recognition of 'state-like relations' that exist within tribes (Sneath 2007). In social sciences, the concept of the tribe, like that of the state has been a controversial one. Gonzalez argued that '[f]ew anthropologists today would consider using the term "tribe" as an analytical category, or even as a concept for practical application' (González 2009b, 15). Tapper noted that attempts to establish a stable terminology for the tribes or viewing them as primordially distinct, bounded social entities and indeed the conceptual dichotomy treating state and tribe as separate are misdirected. Tribe and state have historically evolved in relation to each other in a single, though inherently unstable system (R. Tapper 1990, 55–56).

The reframing of Ibn Khaldun's social theories emphasised the importance of kinship and collective behaviour over individual initiative and the pursuit of self-interest. They conceived of tribes as apolitical units bound together by kinship ties (family relations), but not necessarily by economic interdependencies or hierarchical relations of power (Sneath 2007). Barth's critique of structural explanations led him to study the political system of Pashtuns (Pathans) in Swat (Barth 1959). Instead of kinship, he focused on dyadic relationship of contractual nature in pursuit of individual interest over group (kinship) interests within hierarchically organised land-based economies in Swat. However, critical readings of his work took issue with his approach of methodological individualism, suggesting that in Barth's analysis political allegiance is something that is

bartered between individuals against a return in other advantages, occurring outside a system of domination from above (Asad 1972). This conceptual shift partly reinforced the notion of 'exceptional Pashtuns', understood as agents of free choice willingly participating in a fluid exchange-based economy in which any relations of domination are temporary and revocable (Lindisfarne 2013). A broader conception of politics as relational processes involving asymmetric power relations and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion makes it possible to move beyond structuralist explanations and view everyday life as instances of contest over power and resources among competing elite groups (Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer 2013; Heathershaw and Lambach 2008). This perspective understands the state as a contested terrain in which rival political forces compete over material and symbolic resources (Moore 1993). Inspired by feminist and Marxist traditions, recent critical works have emphasised the need to approach tribal spaces much the same way as households, schools, and factories as sites of competition over power and resources involving different social classes (Sneath 2007).

Refashioning the traditional through Western intervention

The varying outcomes of foreign interventions over the years have generated different imageries of the country. After the First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-1842) and the failed attempt to integrate the country into its broader global order, Britain tried to isolate Afghanistan. It treated the Pashtun tribes as marginal and violent people best left to their own devices (Hopkins 2008, 168). The appointment of Abdul Rahman Khan as ruler in 1880 concluded the second Anglo-Afghan war and deepened British colonial engagement in the country (1878-80). Afterwards, the regular supply of British arms and subsidies played a crucial role in the coercive pacification of the country and the centralisation of state power under Abdul Rahman Khan. At the end of the nineteenth century a largely unified state had emerged, with a regular army and centralised state bureaucracy. In essence, Afghanistan was a British colonial construct intellectually and in political and

economic terms (S. M. Hanifi 2011, preface).[93] A colonially inspired, Kabul-centric view took hold, which increasingly fitted the peripheral tribes into the worldview of the Afghan nation-state. This state-centrism in the late nineteenth century is worth comparing to the claim of tribal autonomy that the British attributed to frontier tribes in the early part of the century, in a quest to wrest control of the frontier areas by contesting the sovereignty of the Afghan ruler over the 'independent' tribes and thus bring them under British colonial rule (Haroon 2007).

A century later, American-backed mujahedin groups fighting government forces gradually increased their hold over territory in the 1980s. As the beleaguered Kabul government withdrew to urban areas, the number of so called liberated areas under mujahedin control multiplied. Military domination and political control was mostly evident at the village level. Foreign journalists and aid workers frequently crossed territories controlled by competing mujahedin groups. Turf wars were common during this period. Often bloody, these conflicts entailed the loss of political credibility, prompting aid agencies to rely on local elders for implementation of aid projects. Hence, jirga and shura,[94] perceived as legitimate institutions of local governance, took on added political significance (Carter and Connor 1989). This trend partly reinforced the celebrated tradition in anthropology of local resistance to central government and the image of Afghanistan as the land of tribes, jirgas and self-governed communities (Shahrani 1998; Barfield 2010). However, as Rubin contended, the Soviet notion of traditionalism and Western views about tribalism in Afghan society 'far from being survivals of ancient traditions, are instead the partial result of the particular mode of integration of the country into the contemporary state system' (Rubin 1995 cited in Kandiyoti 2007, 171–72).

After 2001 there was little room for historical analysis. The emphasis of Western intervention shifted from humanitarian assistance during Taliban times to rebuilding a

[93] This view runs against the widely held view that Afghanistan remained immune from British colonialism, which reinforces the inward looking notion of Afghan society, held among others by American author Louis Dupree (Dupree 1973).

[94] *Shura*, originally an Arabic term, refers to a council or consultative process. In Pashto-speaking regions, *jirga*, which is a Pashto term for an ad-hoc gathering, mainly of tribal notables and local elders is considered the ideal type of consultative forum for resolving local disputes.

centralised state, in an attempt to overcome the violence and political fragmentation of the two previous decades. Under a radical statebuilding programme the role of national leaders and central institutions momentarily increased. However, by mid-decade the authority of a weak central government in rural areas was frequently tested by well-armed and highly motivated insurgents. In response, American commanders concluded that the central government was part of the problem and emphasised the importance of local governance and working with traditional leaders and institutions to achieve stability. The focus of intervention again shifted from the national to the local and from national politicians and institutions to tribal leaders, jirgas and shuras (Ledwidge 2009; Jones 2009; Kilcullen 2009). The change of focus to the local highlighted the need for specialised knowledge about the 'real' Afghanistan – the land of tribes, elders and ancient traditions. Local conflicts and competition for power and resources were increasingly viewed through a tribal prism and inter-tribal squabbling. During NATO's military surge (2009-12) the Obama administration invested additional resources in knowledge production and the use of social sciences for military operations.[95] As a result, the liberal fantasy (of the early years) mainly gave way to orientalist notions of cultural authenticity and the valorisation of traditional and informal actors and institutions. Predictably, it led Western militaries to intensify their engagement with tribal leaders and informal mechanisms of justice and security in the hope of midwifing order and stability (Wimpelmann 2013; Hakimi 2013).

Nearly all elements of modern counterinsurgency, from 'clear, hold and build' tactics to arming tribal militias have their origins in the activities of nineteenth century British colonial administrators. As pioneer of indirect rule, Sir Robert Sandeman, a British political agent in the North West Frontier Province distinguished himself in his dealings with the tribes of the Afghan frontier. In 1891, he insisted that to control the people of the Afghan frontier, the British had to appeal to their hearts and minds (and pockets). By 'knowing the tribes', Sandeman believed he could rule them through their 'traditions' - something both more legitimate in the eyes of the tribesmen and cheaper for the colonial state. He recruited local tribesmen into state-sponsored jirgas and established tribal

[95] Based on conversation with American anthropologist Thomas Barfield, 12 June 2012. Kabul.

militias to police the frontier on behalf of the British (Hopkins and Marsden 2011). More than a century later, the American military attempted to achieve a similar outcome and appealed to tribal Afghans to revolt against the Taliban.

This tribal view of Afghanistan, evident in modern counterinsurgency, consistently downplayed hierarchies of power relations and aspirations for national politics. Afghan tribes are reduced to apolitical entities in a stateless space. Local politics is mainly about the pursuit of parochial and private interests, such as disputes over land and water, with little room for ideology and broader political mobilisation. By selectively reframing Stathis Kalyvas's[96] insights on violence in civil war, counterinsurgency experts routinely describe the insurgency in non-political and binary terms. The picture is in fact far more complex than the Taliban-anti-Taliban or government-insurgent fault line. Using the metaphor of 'intimate war', Martin, for example, emphasised tribal vendettas and personal grievances generated as a result of abuse by local power holders as reason for the insurgency in southern Afghanistan (Martin 2014). Less frequently mentioned are political struggles imbued with larger meanings. Ironically, the Taliban insurgency offers the best rebuttal to essentialised and reified notions of tribal Afghanistan. It has been clear to local observers that the Taliban insurgency operated within a national (not a tribal or Pashtun) framework as it expanded from its southern heartland into other parts of the country. When mobilising both Pashtun and non-Pashtun insurgents in the north, the Taliban relied upon more than just Pashtun feelings of marginalisation or tribal grievances. Religious ties to local mullahs and exploitation of factionalism among rival armed groups and powerbrokers proved crucial in Taliban attempts at infiltration and mobilisation of local resistance (chapter 7 & 8).

The Western militaries' fascination with the tribes habitually translated into representation of customary actors and institutions as locally legitimate (and national ones as illegitimate). Because of this emphasis on local legitimacy and the flow of so much foreign resources to insecure areas in support of counterinsurgency operations, rural Afghans likewise stressed the relevance of local politics over national decision-making and resource distribution. This trend reinforced the tribal view of the country and

[96] For treatment of violence in civil war see (Kalyvas 2006).

left little basis for involvement in national politics or interaction with the state. As a result American commanders frequently described rural Afghans as people who have no loyalty to the state or central authority and only feel loyalty to their tribe (Gant 2009). Nationalism and religion are frequently framed out of Western analysis as an alternate basis for action. As I show below, many villagers and tribal elders in Wardak wanted greater central state involvement in local affairs, in particular local security, mainly because of oppression by local commanders and powerbrokers. Likewise, Pashtun minorities in the north sought greater central government role in local affairs to overcome the corruption and abuse of local, mostly non-Pashtun powerbrokers (chapter 7 & 8).

The rush of interest in Pashtun tribes 'has mainly reified British essentializations of Afghanistan and reproduced a colonial tendency to militarize and weaponize knowledge about Other cultures' (S. M. Hanifi Forthcoming). Despite substantial growth in the number of 'Afghan experts' with intellectual moorings in the tradition of nineteenth century colonial ethnography, this trend has paradoxically led to fragmentation of knowledge.[97] Afghanistan is frequently framed as 'a country that has not had a tradition of central government extending into the far reaches of its provinces' (González 2009b, 15). This made the support of the tribes crucial to government stability, at least in theory.[98] However, the main actors who spearheaded counterinsurgency efforts against Taliban insurgents from mid-decade onwards were local commanders driven by the need to attain or preserve power. The rise to power of mujahedin and Taliban commanders reflect the social transformation of the last four decades. They emerged in the wake of the fracturing of older patterns of leadership during the war years (D. B. Edwards 2002; Dorronsoro 2005; Giustozzi 2009b). In recent years the Taliban have routinely targeted tribal leaders in the south in an attempt to consolidate their hold over the countryside. The privileged position of militia commanders and insurgent leaders in local politics has severely reduced the former political significance of traditional leaders.

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[97] Gills Dorronsoro, Anthony Hyman Memorial Lecture, 12 March 2014. SOAS. London.

[98] The notion that support of the Pashtun tribes is crucial to the stability of Afghan governments is not a purely colonial construct. It has found resonance among the country's new ruling elite. Hamid Karzai expressed a similar belief in a 1988 article analysing Zahir Shah's relatively peaceful reign by linking political stability to the 'absolute support, confidence, and trust' of the tribes in the legitimacy of the royal regime (Karzai 1988, 33).

III. Provincial political and security landscape

Wardak province has an estimated population of over half a million people, lies a mere thirty-five kilometers from Kabul, and is divided into nine districts. It is home to an ethnically mixed population of Pashtun, who constitute a majority in the province, and Hazara and Tajik.[99] It is a resource-poor province, given that it has no border with a neighbouring country to generate custom revenues, little industry and few large-scale commercial enterprises. The majority of the population lives in rural areas (97.7%) and about half of those in remote mountainous areas. Wardak's economy is mainly based on revenues from subsistence and commercial agriculture (46 percent of households) and labour migration and remittances (16 percent). The Kabul-Kandahar highway through the provincial capital (Maidanshahr) and Sayedabad district is a major transport route for commercial goods and ISAF supplies as well as a source of instability and rent seeking by both government officials and the insurgents.[100] Wardak is politically and strategically important because of its proximity to the capital and its status as gateway to the south. This explains why the province has remained so insecure and why, from 2009, it became a testing ground for local governance and local defence initiatives as part of US military efforts to bring stability to Wardak in order to secure Kabul.

The politico-military environment in Wardak had been shaped by a range of armed groups dating back to the pre-2001 years of conflict. The early 1990s was a particularly violent period when competition for power frequently degenerated into armed clashes between the different armed groups. For example, during this time conflicts between Hizb-e-Islami and Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami in Maidanshahr resulted in nearly 3,000

[99] The Wardak districts include the provincial capital Maidanshahr, Nerk, Jalrez, Sayedabad, Chak, Jaghatu, Daimirdad, Behsud-e-Markazi and Hesa-e-Awal Behsud. Government population figures suggest that one-fifth of the population live in Sayedabad, predominantly Pashtun and slightly more than that number in the predominately Hazara district of Behsud-e-Markazi.

[100] As part of a rent-seeking arrangement, the provincial police, local transport mafia and fuel suppliers frequently staged insurgent attacks on NATO supply convoys using roadside bombs. Given that NATO supply vehicles were covered against war-related damages, the insurance money was a major income for local powerbrokers. The police charged $15000 per vehicle to certify an insurance claim linked to insurgent attacks. At the high of military surge (2010-12), hundreds of fuel tankers and other supply vehicles crossed the highway everyday. The value of stolen fuel and insurance returns amounted to millions of dollars per month. Interview # 119, 06.05.2013.

deaths.[101] Other major armed factions included Itihad-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami.[102] Political and military fragmentation continued after the fall of Taliban. Maidanshahr remained in control of commanders loyal to Kabul, but most other districts were controlled by Hizb and Harakat fighters. Fragmentation of authority was clearly reflected in the structure of the provincial administration in late 2001, early 2002. Commander Abdul Ahmad, a Sayyaf loyalist, took the provincial police chief's post. The governor's authority was disputed by a rival local commander who made his own claim to the position. Kabul appointed a local Tajik as head of the intelligence bureau. Military control fell to Muzafaruddin, a former Hizb-e-Islami commander close to Shura-e-Nizar. He took over the army's 42nd division, comprising around 4,000 personnel. Mohammad Musa Hotak and his brother Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, a former Taliban commander, maintained significant quantities of weapons and armed men, and wielded more powerful than the provincial governor. When the Taliban retreated toward Kandahar in later 2001, Wardak was handed over to local mujahedin groups, including Ghulam Mohammad and Musa. Ghulam Mohammad, who claimed that he commanded around three thousand armed men before they were demobilised in 2004.[103] A few months after disarming, the two brothers were detained by US forces. Ghulam Mohammad spent two and half years in US detention in Bagram, and following his release was appointed commander of the US-supported AP3 (see below).

Toward the middle of the decade the security situation in most parts of southern and eastern Afghanistan had deteriorated considerably. By early 2008 the strategically important province of Wardak had become a centre for the insurgency. Maidanshahr had become the focus of frequent insurgent attacks, while the government's influence barely extended beyond the governor's compound. There was growing insecurity in the lead up to the 2004

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[101] During the 1980s, Harakat was led by Maulawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. It was a jihadi party of rural mullahs from whose ranks many of the Taliban movement's leadership later emerged. The party is currently headed by Haji Mohammad Musa Hotak. Musa, a former commander, Taliban deputy minister and MP also served as senior advisor to President Karzai.

[102] Itihad (now Dawat-e-Islami) is led by Abdul Rab-Rasoul Sayyaf, a former MP with close links to Saudi Wahabi groups. Sayyaf has been a close ally of President Karzai. Hizb-e-Wahdat, represented half dozen Hazara jihadi groups supported by Iran during the anti-Soviet jihad. After 2001, as rivalries intensified, Wahdat split into four groups. Two prominent Hazara politicians, vice president Karim Khalili and former planning minister and MP Mohammad Mohaqiq headed two of the splinter groups.

[103] Interview # 22, 09.08.2012. A similar number was mentioned in (Lefèvre 2010, 10).

presidential and 2005 parliamentary elections, mostly in Sayedabad and Nerkh, where Hizb initially enjoyed military superiority. However, its dominance declined as the Taliban intensified their military campaign, and by the end of 2008 most parts of Wardak were under Taliban control. The Taliban had also incorporated many local fighters from Harakat and Hizb in their ranks. The district of Nerkh remained divided between Hizb and Taliban. Jalrez district, which was home to a number of prominent local powerbrokers, emerged as the most contested region, with both Hizb and Taliban carrying out attacks against NATO and government forces. Likewise, Maidanshahr also remained insecure. After his appointment as Governor of Wardak in July 2008, Halim Fidai travelled to Maidanshahr to assume his duties. The security situation had deteriorated to the extent that insurgents were able to fire fifteen rockets into the governor's compound on the day of his inauguration.[104] The insurgents had become so confident that they frequently carried out attacks against government offices located a few hundred metres from the governor's compound. Fearful of Taliban retaliation, civil servants rarely stayed overnight in Maidanshahr or the nearby districts, preferring to escape to the safety of Kabul. The governor of Nerkh district (eight kilometers from Maidanshahr) had relocated his office to a shop in the local bazaar because the district centre had fallen under Taliban and Hizb control.

IV. AP3 – an American experiment in local militias

In response to rising insecurity, the province became a testing ground for US military experiments in stability operations. Afghan and US officials began planning in October 2008 to establish a 1,200-strong force of the AP3 in four of the nine districts in Wardak province: Jalrez, Nerkh, Maidanshahr and Sayedabad. Each district was to have between one hundred and two hundred armed men, but no more than a total of twelve hundred in the entire province. The AP3 guardians, as the US military called them, were supposed to be recruited by local shuras, vetted by government institutions and were to report to the district police chief. They received twenty-one days of training, a vehicle for every

[104] Interview # 19, 11.12.2011.

twenty-five men, AK-47 rifles and a small quantity of ammunition. The programme received technical and financial support from US Special Forces and was managed by the ministry of interior. Individual recruits received $170 per month from the ministry of interior. It was hoped that direct pay to AP3 members would reinforce their loyalty to the state and not militia commanders.

In March 2009, the implementation of AP3 began in Jalrez district. By 2010, the AP3 had 1,100 recruits. The initiative, at least on paper, was part of a broader security effort that included the deployment of additional US troops, training of the ANP, recruitment of AP3 cadres, and the provision of development assistance from the Commander's Emergency Response Programme (CERP). Districts which participated in the programme were eligible for an additional $500,000 in CERP funds (Perito 2009, 10). As a defensive force, the AP3 personnel were assigned guard duties to free up the regular police from the responsibility of protecting government offices and public infrastructure like roads. The AP3's mandate was a product of competing interests and rationales, as alluded to in the previous chapter. Among other things, it sought to improve security by denying insurgents safe havens in rural areas that had been 'cleared' through ISAF and ANSF military operations, to prevent insurgent attacks on government and NATO forces, protect public infrastructure, and to build the public's trust in the government (Perito 2009, 10; Lefèvre 2010). The programme fell victim to many hidden interests, including manipulation by local powerbrokers, who wanted to revive their militias, gain access to state patronage and expand their power. President Karzai's ambition was to regularise and assert control over the various foreign funded militias, and centralise the means of coercion and patronage.[105]

The AP3 faced many of the same problems as the ANAP, especially in terms of recruitment, local buy-in, logistics support, and appropriation by local commanders (chapter 5). AP3 was funded by the US military because European donors objected to payments to a paramilitary force. The European objections were also related to a broader US plan to encourage villagers to form local militias against the insurgency, a step that seemed to undermine earlier disarmament efforts. As a result, the AP3 was seen from the

[105] Interview # 83, 26.07.2012.

beginning as an American programme designed to defeat insurgents rather than to improve policing or the rule of law. Initial recruitment among Tajiks and Hazaras in Jalrez began positively, but recruitment among Pashtuns was slow and met with resistance in the southern Pashtun-dominated districts, where the locals feared Taliban retribution. In addition, there was widespread scepticism towards the programme because of people's bitter experience with local militias during the 1980s and early 1990s (Lefèvre 2010, 9–10; HRW 2011, 44). Afterwards, when hundreds of Pashtuns from Jalrez collectively joined the programme, most of the recruits belonged to the Kharoti sub-tribe, Ghulam Mohammad's own clan.

As insecurity increased in 2008, provincial authorities demanded more regular police to protect government offices, senior officials, and public infrastructure. The AP3 emerged partly as a solution to overcome the manpower gap, given the shortage of regular police. Accounts differ as to the origins and demand for AP3. Governor Fidai claimed it came from local elders, yet in a two-day meeting in Kabul in October 2008, tribal elders and representatives of district shuras and provincial council members rejected a government declaration that intended to show support for the initiative. Instead, local elders asked for the deployment of more ANA and ANP units in Wardak.[106] Some government officials were also against AP3, in particular minister of defence, Rahim Wardak who argued that support to local militias would undermine the ANSF. However, minister of interior, Haneef Atmar endorsed it cautiously. He viewed AP3 as a pragmatic solution to the problem of local insecurity. He explicitly linked it to the wider goal of centralising and bureaucratising the means of coercion, and he emphasised the need for central government control and the regulation of local forces. He preferred arming small groups linked to local shuras, not commanders or large militias, which could pose a military risk to the government. AP3 was envisaged as a stopgap measure tied to the growth of ANSF; militia units would be demobilised and replaced by newly formed regular forces. Furthermore, Atmar envisaged the gradual replacement of private security companies (PSCs) with a ministry of interior guard force – the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF). The AP3 and APPF were two sides of the same coin, part of a broader initiative

[106] Interviews # 29 and 27, 29.12.2011. For discussion of meetings between elders and government officials see (Lefèvre 2010, 9; HRW 2011, 44–45).

to ‘re-nationalise security’. It involved banning PSCs and replacing them with a government force in parallel with the formation of local militias based on the tribal tradition of local policing known as *arbaki*.[107]

The US military and Afghan government pushed ahead with the AP3 implementation regardless of local support. As such there remained a yawning chasm between Western claims about valorising cultural authenticity and non-interference and the actual processes through which local forms of security were promoted and the political effects they ended up producing. So-called local solutions were, in fact, imposed from above as the case of AP3 illustrates graphically. It is a story of how short term measures, based on expediency and quick fixes were delivered in a package bearing the seal of culture and tradition. However, the US military’s attempt to resuscitate Afghan traditions of self-protection - based upon an idealised and reified vision of the past - proved rather difficult to realise as did the assumption that Afghan villagers were willing to stand up and revolt against Taliban. Moreover, assumptions about the capacity of tribal leaders and local shuras to command the loyalties of local villagers proved erroneous, given the influence of militia commanders in post-2001 Afghanistan. A sense of pervasive insecurity and Taliban intimidation compelled many local villagers and powerbrokers to avoid involvement in the AP3 programme.

After almost a year of limited progress, the US military and Afghan officials, including governor Fidai, reached out to Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, former Taliban commander and Bagram inmate, to rescue the programme by taking up arms against his former colleagues.[108] Hotak reportedly brought hundreds of his own supporters from Jalrez to the force, but after a few months of poor government support through the ministry of interior, he quit the programme (Lefèvre 2010, 10; HRW 2011, 46). Hotak, later, bitterly regretted his decision to join the AP3. He added that funding for the programme was always late, and he had to buy basic supplies for the force. As a result, he accumulated considerable personal debt.[109] Many other local commanders also became heavily indebted because of late payments and inadequate logistical support, forcing them to dig into their own

[107] Interview # 83, 05.08.2012. For analyses of arbaki, see FN # 2 and (Osman 2008).
[108] Interview # 19, 11.12.2011.
[109] Interview # 22, 09.05.2012.

pockets in order to support their men, resources for which they allegedly were never properly compensated.[110] In interviews, former commanders and their men complained about the lack of weapons, ammunition and winter supplies as well as late salary payments. Although part of a plan that required additional US and Afghan forces to clear areas before AP3 was deployed to hold them, most AP3 units said they were used for clearing purposes and were described by local commanders as 'shields of meat', stood up to receive Taliban bullets.[111] As a result of poor support from the ministry of interior, AP3 units in Wardak remained dependent on US Special Forces for basic supplies. Despite repeated attempts by governor Fidai to address the AP3's shortcomings, the US military and the ministry of interior mostly ignored him. The main points of concern were the lack of trust and support both from the Afghan government and local communities, unclear operational procedures, lack of sustainable resources, poor logistics, weak command and control structure and lack of strong back up or Quick Reaction support from the ANSF.[112]

The lightly armed personnel of the AP3 were not adequately prepared to fight better-motivated and more heavily armed Taliban fighters. Most of them were used as frontline troops, which resulted in significant losses in some parts of Wardak. One commander lost more than half of his men in just over a year.[113] Local commanders contended that the Americans simply contracted the war to local villagers. They adopted a bunker mentality and hunkered down in their fortified bases, from the safety of which they watched as different local armed groups clashed with one another – the last one standing would be dealt with in the end, seemed to be the American thinking.[114] Local villagers in Wardak were used as low-cost and dispensable 'trigger-pullers' in America's global war on terror (Rosenau 2008). The Taliban-Hizb conflict in Nerkh, which the government and US forces allegedly fomented, fits into this kind of narrative (see below). For many people this was the real purpose of the US military presence in Wardak. The discourse about tribal traditions of self-protection served as a mere fig leaf to deflect attention from the real business of war. Former

[110] Interview # 26, 17.12.2011.
[111] Interview # 24, 13.09.2011.
[112] Interview # 19, 11.12.2011.
[113] Interview # 24, 13.9.2011.
[114] Interviews # 26, 17.12.2011; # 24, 13.09.2011 and # 22, 12.12.2011.

minister Atmar and one of the architects of the programme agreed with some of the criticism. He acknowledged that the Afghan government and the US military made mistakes and discredited the AP3 initiative in Wardak. However, instead of accepting the blame, local commanders of the AP3 were set up to be a 'scapegoat' for a common failure by Afghan officials and US commanders. In short, the local 'defenders' were 'betrayed by their own sponsors'.[115]

The AP3 was mostly used by US Special Forces to carry out night raids and targeted killings against insurgents, and played a limited role in protecting the local population. The US military considered the AP3 a success but remained sceptical of expanding it to other provinces because it was slow to take off, resource intensive, and bureaucratically cumbersome. They had hoped for a more nimble approach that would bring about rapid improvement in security and win hearts and minds. Although security along the roads had improved, in particular in Jalrez where AP3 was heavily deployed, and people could visit the districts, government officials considered most district centres unsafe for overnight stay (Lefèvre 2010, 12). Although critics conceded that it had helped bring about relative security, violence levels had in fact increased in 2010, when AP3 had reached its full strength (ibid 2010). Proximity to Kabul also meant that central state elites had greater influence in destabilising the situation as support flowed to competing armed groups for military and political dominance, as the case of Hizb-e-Islami in Nerkh illustrates.[116]

V. Change of guard: AP3's transition to ALP

By summer 2010, the AP3 was transitioned into the newly approved ALP.[117] However, the problems inherited from the AP3 – including limited popularity, poor recruitment and logistics, and weak command and control - were considered so serious that ISAF finally took steps in the winter of 2011 to address them. In the summer of that year, the ministry

[115] Interview #83, 26.07.2012.
[116] Hizb affiliated factions in the President's office, in particular Chief of Staff Abdul Karim Khurram have been accused of supporting Hizb in Wardak.
[117] Figures obtained by author in December 2011 showed 350 ALP members in Jalrez district. A December 2012 US Defence Department report mentioned a total figure of 576 ALP in Wardak (U.S. Department of Defense 2012, 81).

of interior had established new guidelines for the implementation of the ALP (MOI 2011). This led the US military to announce an ambitious plan to 'fix' ALP and 'redo it all over again', according to the newly established guidelines.[118] The first step in reforming the ALP in Wardak involved the demobilisation of 260 members of the force from Maidanshahr and Sayedabad, who had earlier been transitioned into the ALP. They were demobilised because they did not meet the new ALP recruitment guidelines, which stipulated, among other things, that the ALP recruits should be recruited from local villages through shuras and vetted by local elders and government institutions and should report to the district police chief. Most of the targeted recruits were from Bamyan, Laghman, and Jalalabad, though some belonged to other parts of Wardak where the ALP had not yet been established. In violation of procedure, most of them served guard duties in Maidanshahr and provided personal protection to provincial officials, who were not happy to have their personal guards dismissed as part of the reform process.

The application of the new ALP guidelines paved the way to establish ALP units in other districts. However, the US military attempts in the spring and summer of 2012 to expand the ALP to Wardak's insecure southern districts of Chak, Daimirdad and Jaghatu petered out when the programme encountered similar problems as before. The US military's figures indicated only a handful of new recruits in Chak (U.S. Department of Defense 2012, 81). The difficulty of expanding ALP to southern districts in Wardak had been evident in February 2012 when Governor Fidai and US Special Forces tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade elders in Sayedabad to 'give their sons' to the ALP. In response, the local elders requested more army and police in place of the ALP. However, despite the outcome in Sayedabad, the US military seemed undeterred. Whilst the ALP guidelines stipulated clear modalities for the recruitment of new cadres, this proved rather difficult in practice, as illustrated in the ethnographic vignette provided below. Instead, the ALP fed into existing patron-client networks at different levels in the government and reinforced the power of local commander-networks, powerbrokers in the provincial and central government and members of Parliament.

[118] Interview # 21, 12.12.2011.

A call to arms goes unheeded: Americans in search of ALP recruits

A cold winter morning on 6 February 2012 in Wardak's Sayedabad District provided the setting for a US military 'Information Operations' ceremony organised by American Special Forces to launch the ALP programme in Sayedabad. They and their Afghan counterparts had come to Sayedabad to ask local elders to volunteer their sons to join the ALP, which they planned to establish in the district. In order to legitimise the process and give the appearance of an Afghan lead, the Americans had brought along senior Afghan government officials from the provincial capital Maidanshahr, including Wardak's governor, Halim Fidai. As officials entered, a small group of elders and young men got up to greet them. The room quickly filled to half its capacity as more villagers arrived in the hall. Local officials were obviously keen to put on a good show, and in their enthusiasm to make a positive impression they had clearly coaxed local villagers from the vicinity of the district centre into attendance. The visiting officials also included the district governor of Sayedabad, provincial and district police chiefs, army commanders and intelligence officers, in addition to a sizeable number of US Special Forces officers and soldiers. They, with their guns, ammo, and flak jackets were occupying the other half of the meeting hall.

Once the officials and dignitaries took their place at the head of the congregation, the local villagers sat facing them in neat rows on the carpeted floor. Governor Halim Fidai, who unlike many of his counterparts was a trained religious scholar, had come to Sayedabad to deliver a message of deliverance to a people suspected of having strayed from the path of God, and of the government - the difference between the two not always being clearly differentiated by those in power. The government was reaching out to local villagers to give them a chance to save themselves from evil - the Taliban - by joining the ALP. Over the previous months, a number of reform initiatives, including the disarming and restructuring of existing ALP units in Maidanshahr and other districts had been completed. The aim of this exercise was, ostensibly, to weed out ALP members who in the past had not been properly recruited according to the established guidelines, although some units were simply moved from one district to another. This was in preparation for the expansion of the ALP programme to new districts. Sayedabad was one of these districts.

Fazil Karim Muslim, a former Hizb-e-Islami commander and the district governor of

Sayedabad opened the meeting and briefly spoke, primarily to prepare the ground for Governor Fidai's call to arms by reminding the audience that it was the duty of every Muslim to end *fitna* – i.e. discord or civil war in the Muslim community. The time had finally come to act, he emphasised, and the ALP was the instrument of their deliverance. Governor Fidai spoke next. He exhorted the old and young of Sayedabad to show courage and defy the Taliban by joining the ALP to protect their communities. After repeating this point a few times, finally, a man from the audience responded to the governor's call by saying that '*da khpal tzan defa pa har cha farz da*' (the defence of one's self is everyone's obligation) - but he left unstated whether he meant against the Americans or Taliban. Playing on a mix of tribal, religious and nationalistic sentiments, the governor thanked this man, and further argued that once security had been established through ALP there was no reason for foreign forces to stay in Afghanistan. In other words, the surest way to ensure the departure of American forces, whose night raids and air strikes in particular were major sources of popular angst, was for Afghans to stand up to Taliban and defeat them. 'This would be like killing two birds with one stone', the governor emphasised.

Shershah Bazoon, the head of the provincial council, spoke after the governor and stressed the material benefits of the programme by pointing out that other districts had acquired security, roads, and development thanks to ALP; it was now Sayedabad's turn. The ideological discourse, both religious and nationalistic, which had dominated the start of the meeting had now changed to a material discourse on the monetary and developmental incentives offered by an occupying power to poor Afghan villagers in exchange for agreeing to fight the Taliban. He then invited the elders gathered that day to play their part by joining the government and foreign forces to bring security to Wardak. The appeal to elders and local shuras for help in improving the government's reach and services to the country's rural population was a familiar trope, deployed by government officials to legitimise government interventions as well conceal their shortcomings. It also echoed the invocation of earlier patronage-based politics, which tied local powerbrokers to the central government and extended the government's authority using a system of indirect rule (chapter 4 & 5).

At the end of his speech, Governor Fidai asked the participants to raise their hands to signify that they agreed with his proposal to form ALP units in Sayedabad. Initially only a

few did so, at which point, encouraged from the sidelines by the commander of US Special Forces in Wardak, a US Army Lt. Colonel, the governor emphasised the point repeatedly until almost everyone had raised their hands. The governor, emphasising the need not to repeat past mistakes - in reference to the post-Soviet period when the mujahedin engaged in internal power struggles and prepared the way for Taliban and Al Qaeda to take root - forced a show of hands in favour of the ALP. However, there still appeared to be little meaningful support for his suggestion, and an elder, Malik Azizullah, intervened to remind the audience how in the past, government-backed militia had created many problems for the people of Wardak. They retained memories of that period, he said, and still recalled the reign of terror in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He lamented that in spite of such warnings, the government went ahead and formed arbaki militias.[119] In his own village, he said, '15-to-20-year-old boys were employed in the arbaki militias and they didn't even consider me, a *malik*,[120] a man of some means and reputation a *saray*.[121] They made fun of a *spin ghirai*[122] like me.' This short, eloquent statement, delivered in a firm voice, directly challenged the provincial governor's request, and Azizullah then urged the governor and other officials to deploy regular army soldiers and policemen rather than repeating the mistakes of the past by arming local villagers with guns.

In the past, the AP3 had come under constant criticism on account of abuses committed by its members in Wardak. Most locals, therefore, remained sceptical of US military claims that this time round they would do things differently, starting with 'fixing' the AP3 and then expanding the ALP in Wardak. A prominent member of the provincial council, echoing the sentiments of his people, succinctly expressed the dilemma of most Wardakis when he pointed out that 'the local people wanted more ANA and ANP, but instead the Americans imposed the AP3 and the ALP'.[123] Although the meeting ended with the US

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[119] The NATO- and government-backed militias were commonly referred to as *arbaki*, but the government and the Americans insisted that the ALP units should not be called arbaki. By arbaki, in this case, Malik Azizullah meant the AP3 militias.

[120] *Malik* is a government-appointed local leader, generally a wealthy landowner. In his role as intermediary, he is tasked with facilitating the interaction between local villagers and government officials in the district administration.

[121] In Pashtun culture, telling someone that 'you are not a man', *saray-naye*, is a grave insult, basically questioning the person's manhood and ability to protect his property and household.

[122] Pashto word for 'white-beard' or 'elder'.

[123] Interview # 27, 29.12.2012.

military officers and government officials somewhat disappointed at the outcome, the event was nevertheless declared a success by the organisers, while local villagers hurried back to their homes, in the hope of avoiding reprisals from Taliban for taking part in the meeting. As already noted, this call to arms can be interpreted as 'getting savages to fight barbarians' (Duffield 2005). As Duffield argues, such calls to arms have a 'civilisational' purpose in the sense of attempting to provide a bulwark against threats to American empire. But this was difficult to sell to a highly sceptical and vulnerable public, with few believing the rhetoric of self-protection coming from a foreign army that held *shuras* with elders by day and attacked their villages at night. The initiative was presented as an attempt to restore Afghanistan to its allegedly harmonious traditions of the past.[124] The governor, far from holding to a vision of the state as an agent of modernity and bureaucratic efficiency, tried to sell the idea of tradition, self-reliance, and local security to a sceptical public of largely illiterate rural Afghans – ironically, the sorts of people the state habitually targets for its projects of high modernity (Scott 1998; Mitchell 2002). In this sense, it is 'a cheap and politically backward form of colonialism' (Duffield 2005, 144) and an example of 'decentralized despotism' (Mamdani 1996, 18), since the true objective of the project was not to bring representative democracy to the people but to govern native society through self-appointed local clients. This brief encounter, therefore, provided a small window into the world of US counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and its ill-conceived efforts to mobilise 'the tribes' in defence of American imperialism.

VI. The limits of tradition and the lure of violence

This section describes the final stages of the ALP in Wardak. In the early months of 2010, as the harsh winter gave way to spring, concerns over the Taliban's spring offensive increased anxieties about security in Wardak. The US military-Afghan government attempts to 'fix' the ALP and expand it to new districts had produced few tangible results. Governor Fidai and his US Special Forces counterparts were now

[124] See Mamdani (2012) and Hopkins (2011) on the re-invention of native tradition as a pre-condition of indirect rule. The aim was to rule 'tribal' society through colonially appointed 'traditional' leaders.

searching for a more dramatic solution to contain the insurgency and improve security. Realising that public opinion was coalescing against the ALP, by the summer of 2012 Fidai had given up trying to 'fix' the ALP in Wardak. With pressure mounting ahead of Taliban's spring offensive, he wrote to President Karzai on 12 March, pointing out that the ALP had not worked in Wardak and recommended that the 1,600-strong ALP force be disbanded and replaced with 1,000 regular police (at the time, Wardak had slightly more than 800 ANP personnel).[125] In his letter to President Karzai, Fidai pointed out that the ALP was not suitable for Wardak. Some of the reasons he noted were that tribal structures had been decimated by years of conflict; the tribes remained internally divided; and factional rivalries and conflicts among local powerbrokers ran deep. Most importantly, because the Taliban insurgency remained strong in most parts of Wardak and the government could not guarantee sufficient security, people generally feared for their lives and avoided a controversial programme like ALP. In such a contested environment there was little support for a programme that risked exacerbating conflicts. Instead of forming local militias, Fidai suggested that a better alternative to the formation of local militias was the additional deployment of national security forces. However, the government did not immediately react to Fidai's recommendation.

In private, senior US military officers and the political leadership in Kabul had more or less come to the same conclusion as Fidai. By late spring and early summer of 2012, the situation in Wardak had become so difficult that there were even serious suggestions made by senior government officials that the US military should secretly arm Hizb-e-Islami commanders in Nerkh district, and possibly other areas, and use them as a proxy militia against the Taliban. Apparently, this was not a new idea when it was floated a few times during meetings between US commanders in Wardak, governor Fidai and local elders representing Hizb commanders in Nerkh. In 2010 and 2011, Taliban and Hizb factions in Nerkh frequently clashed over the control of territory and organising attacks against foreign forces. Local observers believed that the government and US forces were behind the clashes in Nerkh. To weaken the Taliban, the government, acting as a conduit for the US military, had secretly sent arms to Hizb commanders, enabling them to beat

[125] Governor Halim Fidai's letter to President Karzai, dated 12 March 2012. On file with author.

back a number of Taliban attacks.[126] By late 2012, the suggested alternative to the ALP, namely arming local Hizb-e-Islami commanders had failed to materialise, possibly because of central government and US objections to empowering a local insurgent group with dubious loyalty. Moreover, relying on groups like Hizb-e-Islami to defeat the Taliban would have undermined the strategy of building up the ANA and ANP. Despite initial denials, in May of that year, US forces in Wardak eventually admitted to having carried out joint military operations with Hizb-e-Islami forces against their Taliban enemies in Nerkh, vindicating the accounts given by local observers (Sieff 2012a).

With the failure of ALP in Wardak, the US military abandoned the ambitions of a transformative counterinsurgency campaign (protection of civilians, good governance, and development) and reverted to counterterrorism tactics and the use of covert operations by Special Forces and proxy militias. However, the political costs of this shift were considerable; the last phase of US military presence in Wardak resulted in extremely tense relations between the US and Afghan governments. In the spring of 2012, the US military operations in Wardak began to undergo important changes. As part of President Obama's planned withdrawal, the US military withdrew its regular forces from many parts of Wardak and replaced them with additional US Special Forces. The plan also involved the transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces, even though governor Fidai and the ANSF leadership had strong reservations about the handover of security responsibilities to poorly trained and ill-equipped Afghan forces (Sieff 2012b). As a result of changes to troop deployments, the role of regular forces diminished, while that of Special Forces and counter-terrorism pursuit teams increased. This was the background to the alleged war crimes by American Special Forces, which occurred between October 2012 and February 2013 during search operations for suspected insurgents in Nerkh and Maidanshahr. In February 2013, allegations had emerged of abduction, torture, and extrajudicial killings by US Special Forces and Afghan militia units associated with them in Wardak (Welch and Shalizi 2013). It was later established

[126] Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami in Nerkh accused each other of being someone else's puppets in what seemed like a competition over which group had greater legitimacy to wage jihad against foreign forces. The Taliban accused Hizb of being pro-government which gave legitimacy to their campaign to 'give priority to killing Hizb people over Americans' (Tabee 2011).

that US Special Forces had operated private prisons and interrogation centres in their base in Nerkh district, where they tortured prisoners (Aikins 2013). Provincial authorities claimed that around seven hundred families had been displaced as a result of insecurity created by the abusive actions of US Special Forces and their Afghan proxies.[127] The incidents in Nerkh and Maidanshahr districts indicate that the problem of militias in Wardak extended well beyond the ALP programme. In the reports that surfaced, attention was focused on Zekria Kandahari, an Afghan-American who, people in Wardak claimed, was the commander of the secret militia which carried out most of the abuses against civilians.

The revelation of US Special Forces activities further complicated the US military's stabilisation efforts in Wardak. The allegations prompted President Karzai to order all US Special Forces out of Wardak within two weeks. In March, the US military began the withdrawal of its Special Forces from Nerkh. In their place, the government deployed Afghan Special Forces to work alongside regular Afghan army units to ensure security in Nerkh and Maidanshahr. Subsequent investigations by government and the US military brought little clarity as to what exactly had taken place in Wardak, and most importantly which force(s) had perpetrated the abuses. President Karzai maintained a clear line, accusing US Special Forces of committing these abuses, while the US military and ISAF continued to deny any involvement.[128] In July 2013, Afghan government officials reported that Zekria had been captured, after he had mysteriously slipped away from US custody some months earlier. He told Afghan interrogators that a US Special Forces team based in Nerkh had been responsible for the torture and killing of prisoners in late 2012 and early 2013 in Wardak, which the UN suggested may amount to war crimes, if proven (UNAMA and UNOHCHR 2013b, 48).

Wardak's history of irregular warfare, attempts to expand the ALP, and clandestine operations by US Special Forces and local militia are suggestive of a 'dirty war' in the context of protracted insecurity. These local proxies working alongside the US military are rarely 'good guys' nominated by village elders and accountable to local shuras or the

[127] Interview # 27, 17.04.2013.
[128] Interview # 103.

government. Rather, they are brutal men like Zekria Kandahari who as militia commanders have built fearsome reputations, often committing a litany of human rights abuses while in the service of the US military; and they remain unaccountable, despite clear evidence of abusive behaviour. Perhaps the lack of attribution of responsibility in this case was intentional, because off the books and unaccountable militias provide plausible deniability to those who rely on them. In other words, by outsourcing violence and repression, states can reduce international and domestic legal and political liability, as evidenced by the lack of accountability for the crimes in Wardak. This raises concerns about the post-2014 presence of US intelligence and military assets and the future role of the CIA and US Special Force in arming Afghan paramilitary units for counterterrorism missions in the region (Clark 2013a).

Evidently, President Karzai's concerns about the role of US Special Forces in arming local militias outside central government control, which resulted in the establishment of the ALP in the summer of 2010, was justified in view of the abuses later perpetrated in Wardak. However, despite a formal agreement between the two governments on the regulation of local militias, President Karzai could not fully control the conduct of the US military in the field. The Afghan government maintains that the CIA and US Special Forces continued to support the creation of local militias outside the ALP framework, which undermined efforts to centralise the means of coercion.[129] The issue subsequently became mixed up with a number of other centralising initiatives that set President Karzai on a collision course with the Americans, including the regulation of PSCs, control over the US military prison in Bagram, night raids by Special Forces, and the use of NATO air strikes by Afghan forces. In many of these cases, the President managed to assert his authority and strengthen the country's sovereignty. However, the final legacy of US military presence in Wardak was a deeply contested one, and serves as a warning against the delusional accounts given by US commanders regarding the tribal tradition of self-protection, and the value of using the tribes and local militias for security in rural areas (see the two quotations at the beginning of the chapter). As this chapter illustrates, arming

[129] Interview # 104.

local militias in a contested environment resulted in a dynamic of competitive rearmament, which greatly exacerbated local conflicts.

VII. Conclusions

We now return to the 6 February meeting in Sayedabad. The ALP ceremony ended just before lunch that day. US military helicopters took off from the US Forward Operating Base Sayedabad and transported the government dignitaries and US officers back to Maidanshahr. Over lunch, a local journalist covering the event on behalf of a US contractor told Governor Fidai that he was not hopeful that the locals in Sayedabad would agree to send their sons to join the ALP. The locals, he believed, were too intimidated to defy the Taliban and provide recruits to ALP. He noted that most elders lacked power and had lost influence over their young ones. To reinforce the point, he evoked the words of Malik Azizullah, who had complained that morning about the armed men belonging to *arbaki* militias (AP3) who did not even consider him a *saray* (a man) and made fun of him as a *spin ghirai* (white-beard). Most of the local elders had come in secret to the meeting and refused to uncover their faces for fear of being recognised. They avoided TV cameras and refused to give interviews; how unlikely, then, they would find the courage to openly support a government-run militia programme backed by the US military.

The justification for the ALP, promoted by, among others, Gen. Bolduc (one of its founders) - that the programme is culturally appropriate, Afghan-led, less intrusive, and a more cost effective response to the insurgency (Bolduc 2011, 27) – is not supported by research findings from Wardak. The ALP and its predecessors were top-down processes, opposed to the wishes of the local people and contradicted the claims of local ownership. As the encounter in Sayedabd showed, external actors and Kabul-appointed officials were the main proponents of the idea of arming local militias in Wardak. The proponents of ALP argued that violent and abusive commanders did not represent the 'real' ALP. They insist that when properly implemented, ALP members are vetted by elders, are bound to their communities and answerable to the police chief in the district. But this line of argument ignored the fundamental reality that the programme served as a conduit for a host of unaccountable armed groups, former insurgents and proxies for US Special Forces, and

mainly empowered local commanders and provincial powerbrokers (Van Bijlert 2013). Instead of reducing violence, the arming of local militias tended to intensify factional power struggles, as illustrated by frequent clashes between Hizb-e-Islami and Taliban in Nerkh. Such policies of wholesale coercion and brutalisation, it has been argued, have contributed to a dirty war that increases insecurity for Afghans and, in turn, further justifies arming local militias by foreign forces (Boone 2011). The end result in Wardak was a highly contingent and unstable political outcome. There were indications by early 2013 of a 'back to the future' scenario, whereby US Special Forces apparently relied on 'secret' militias outside the purview of the Afghan government in its efforts to contain the local insurgency – and left a string of dead, tortured and disappeared civilians in their wake.[130]

The ALP in Wardak constitutes a microcosm of the dynamics of conflict in Afghanistan as a whole. Western politicians invoke the image of Afghanistan as an 'ungoverned space', a zone of chaos and a frontline in the war on terror. Wardak itself is positioned in this discourse as the frontline of the war against Taliban 'barbarians'. In this seemingly epochal confrontation, civilisation and barbarians mutually sustain each other. The Taliban thrive on the presence of foreign infidels, a reference to NATO and US forces, while at the same time Taliban's continued armed resistance provides the justification for continued US military presence. This is the sub-text to the tense, and at times corrosive relationship between President Karzai and his Western allies, which was fully on display in the Consultative Jirga that approved the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement in 2013 (Clark 2013b). The political economy generated by the West's war on terror has created ample opportunities for some Afghans to thrive and profit, and many people have a lot to lose from a reduced military presence and even more from a complete withdrawal of NATO and US troops. It is little wonder that Afghan politicians and businessmen-and-women who profit from NATO presence were the most vocal advocates of the BSA with the US, which President Karzai refused to sign. As Keen argues, war may be less about defeating the enemy than maintaining a system in which insurgents and counter-insurgents both accrue benefits (Keen 2012, 88). A range of different actors and organisations accrue political and economic benefits from the ALP programme, and each fights to shape the process to their own

[130] Interview # 104.

advantage. This explains why, in spite of its evident failure, the programme persists, albeit in different forms. Keeping out the barbarians may be a lucrative business. Whether it works or not - and indeed whether there are, in fact, barbarians - is beside the point.

The call to arms in Sayedabad, and the US military's move to mobilise local villagers in Wardak against the Taliban more generally, may be interpreted as a paradoxical attempt by the representatives of modernity and civilisation to impose a traditional mode of governance on a subject people, who had initially been made the target of its emancipatory and liberating discourse by the Bush Administration to justify military intervention in 2001. However, those alleged to be enmeshed in their tribal ways and traditions refused Western and Afghan government attempts to lock them into indigeneity and then police them by invoking tradition. Instead of escaping from the centralising and modernising influences of the state (Scott 1985; Scott 1990), they insisted on inclusion within it. The corollary of this is that the idea, popularised by American scholar Louis Dupree, of a traditional Afghan peasantry erecting a metaphorical 'mud curtain' to keep the modernising influences of the state at bay or to limit contact with the outside world no longer applies, if it ever did (Dupree 1973). The war appears to have changed Afghans' expectations of the state after years of experiencing 'decentralized despotism', and their willingness to be encompassed by it. Many of the inhabitants of Sayedabad wanted more state involvement in local affairs not less, though they wished for a state that was legitimate and endowed with the capacity to provide security and a modicum of justice. In fact the US military and Afghan government's turn to patronage, tradition and reliance on local clients and informal security forces is a very old strategy of power, echoes of which can be found in Afghanistan's history of indirect rule and brokering arrangements. However, there is a crucial difference between endogenous state-making and centralisation of power as a result of a historical 'civilizing process' (Elias 1982) and the organic emergence of new political orders, as against the reality of coercion and imperial imposition by Special Forces and counterinsurgency experts' attempts at social engineering.

In sum, many elders from different parts of Wardak demanded national solutions to the problem of insecurity and resisted attempts by proponents of counterinsurgency to impose so-called local solutions in the name of tradition. However, Governor Fidai and the US military, in an attempt to secure the future, were reaching backwards 'to reconnect and

rejuvenate earlier colonial modes of governing the world of peoples' by relying on local proxies to defeat the insurgency (Duffield 2005, 141). In so doing, they inadvertently exposed the limits and contradictions of the 'cultural turn' in US counterinsurgency (Gregory 2008). After more than a decade of muddling through, the United States was leaving behind a violently transformed landscape dominated by local militias and only loosely held together by short term deals with local allies for whom violence and predation has become an effective means of staying in power.

Chapter 7: Contested landscapes: Violence, memory and power struggles in Baghlan

After putting Andarabis in the seat of power, Hizb-e-Islami commanders went back to their homes and were not included in the new power set up.[131]

The Pashtuns handed Pul-e-Khumri over to the Andarabis. Soon enough, many Hizb-e-Islami commanders regretted that decision. Nurul Haq tried to exploit these sentiments by calling on his fellow Pashtuns to unite and take back Pul-e-Khumri from the Andarabis.[132]

ALP is nothing but a rogue militia. It has empowered criminals like Nurul Haq who prey on his own Pashtuns. It has undermined the authority of the government. I told the [US] Special Forces not to support criminals.[133]

I. Introduction

This chapter examines the contestations over power and resources in the northern province of Baghlan. The protagonists in this struggle involved Taliban insurgents, Tajik commanders from Andarab district affiliated with Jamiat-e-Islami and Pashtun powerbrokers associated with Hizb-e-Islami in Pul-e-Khumri and northern Baghlan - and their US military allies. I provide the account of an armed clash between Pashtun members of the government-backed ALP force and the provincial police dominated by Andarabi commanders in order to highlight the complex dynamics of the power struggle in Baghlan. This incident, which took place in late September 2011 in a crowded market in the provincial capital, offers a window into the complex and ever shifting landscape of social relations and competition over power and resources between different armed groups in the province after 2001. Although historically constructed, the present manifestation of this contest involved a changing cast of characters, shifting politico-

[131] Interview # 9, 18.10.2011.
[132] Interview # 14, 05.12.2011.
[133] Interview # 11.

military alliances and conflicting loyalties. The protagonists are not easily dividable on the basis of the Pashtun-Tajik identity categories[134] or the binary notion of pro-government and anti-government and insurgent and counterinsurgent. Factionalism existed as much within as across apparently hardened communal and factional lines. Pashtuns in Baghlan are far from a cohesive social group, and depending on their relative position in the local tapestry of power and internal competition for leadership, rival factions sought to add to their strength by negotiating alliances within and across ethnic and party lines, including with powerbrokers in the central government. Likewise, authority among the Tajiks was equally fragmented, and different armed groups linked to rival powerbrokers in the provincial government engaged in turf wars over access to lucrative government jobs and the commercial exploitation of state-owned lands and industries, including prized real estate belonging to the derelict industrial plants like the Baghlan cotton mill and rents from trade and agriculture, including the opium crop.

Local power struggles play a crucial role in structuring contemporary centre-periphery relations. A process-oriented study like the ALP offers a window into the workings of local politics, helping to unsettle the binary notion that commonly posits a weak central government perpetually entangled in conflict with strongmen in the periphery. By contrast, the processes traced in this chapter show that the expansion of central government power was not always achieved at the cost of reducing the power of local powerbrokers; they often worked together – to reframe a term from Sassen (2008), the national was clothed in the local, and vice versa. As this chapter demonstrates, national

[134] Building off of Barth's work on *Ethnic groups and boundaries* (1969), this thesis analyses ethnicity, as a form of cultural identity, as socially constructed and historically situated phenomenon, in the sense that people put organisational effort into creating and maintaining what they believe to be coherent discourses and performances, separating the identities they wish to emphasis (ethnic, local, sectarian, etc) from other identities (national, regional, religious, etc) and displaying signs of common membership or stressing belief in common origin in order to organise the world in a certain way and mobilise group solidarity and support for a particular political cause. As Barth argued, cultural authenticity is a problematic concept, and instead emphasised the complexity, adaptability and fluidity of identity categories. Sectarian and ethnic labels, therefore, tend to be more fluid, shifting in response to changing political and personal circumstances, and can be easily modified or renegotiated in order to justify claims to authority or to underpin legitimacy rather than existing as fixed identities. Although I use the ethnic labels of Tajik and Pashtun in this chapter, partly due to the fact that these labels were regularly used by my informants, I do so with the full awareness of the problems associated with their use in this way and it is not my intention to reinforce the notion of any rigid or fixed identity categories.

level elite pacts like the Karzai-Fahim alliance and patronage-based politics more generally kept a lid on local conflicts and strengthened executive power in the provinces. To strengthen their own local power bases, Kabul-based elites relied on peripheral political economies and the strongmen they created and sustained. This centre-periphery dynamics in turn empowered local powerbrokers many of whom reaped enormous fortunes from access to central government and international patronage. Retaining lucrative government posts like the governor or police chief depended on the outcome of patrimonial bargains with the ruling elite in the central government and their local clients and was part of the granting of state privileges and favours in exchange for political loyalty. Such patronage-based interdependencies and constant power struggles among local rivals, which resulted in frequent interventions from Kabul, reflected the close integration of national and peripheral political economies upon which the stability of the broader post-2001 political settlement actually rested. In situations of fragmented authority scrambles for power and alliance making and hedging bets are common survival strategies. Weaker parties in local conflicts tend to seek alliances with external actors endowed with stronger military capabilities to achieve balance of power in relation to local rivals. This explains why the Pashtuns in Baghlan joined a stronger Taliban in the 1990s but then abandoned them and allied with a rejuvenated Northern Alliance backed by the US military to topple the Taliban in 2001. Following the resurgence of the Taliban in the north some Pashtuns drifted in and out of the insurgency and pro-government militias. With the deployment of American troops in 2010 a growing number of local insurgents and Pashtun villagers joined the burgeoning ranks of NATO-and-government-backed militias. However, whenever the military balance shifted in favour of the Taliban some members of the local militias rejoined the insurgency.

This study of pro-government militias in Baghlan attempts to disentangle, contextualise and historicise the 'situated struggles and legacies of violence' (Moore 2005) that have shaped and re-shaped power relations in the province and ultimately resulted in multiple modes of power and partial sovereignties. In order to historicise the emergence of government-backed militias, I sketch out some of the power struggles and alliance making that preceded the formation of the ALP which helps to contextualise the decision of Pashtun powerbrokers and government officials to set up local militias, starting in Pul-

e-Khumri. As part of chronicling this history, I introduce prominent local powerbrokers and highlight their place in Baghlan's 'armed politics' and the evolution of local militias. Former Jamiat commanders Rasoul Mohsini[135] and Mustafa Mohsini[136] from Andarab district were close allies of Panjshiri vice president Fahim Qasim. They had considerable influence in the provincial administration and security forces.[137] As their political adversaries, Mullah Alam,[138] Alam Jan[139] and Nurul Haq[140] played important roles in the evolution of arbaki[141] and ALP militias in Baghlan.

The fragility of political settlements, the contested view of local security,[142] the opportunistic behaviour of local armed groups,[143] partial control of territory and increase in NATO and Taliban military activities turned Baghlan into an important setting for the formation of government-and-NATO-backed local militias. In contrast to Wardak (chapter 6) the impetus for forming local militias in Baghlan emerged from the local Pashtuns' concerns over the loss of power and resources, a chance to renegotiate the dominance of rival groups in the provincial government and as a defence against Taliban attacks or protection against predation by government forces. American troops and counterinsurgency doctrine did not play a formative role in establishing the first group of local militias in Pul-e-Khumri. The militias, later supported and expanded by US forces emerged not so much to protect the local administration against Taliban attacks but in fact in opposition to it. The Tajik-dominated local administration and security forces criticised the formation of local militias on the grounds that it had empowered criminal elements among the Pashtuns who preyed on local villagers and their disregard for the law undermined government authority by creating competing and parallel legal and

[135] Rasoul Mohsini served as head of the provincial council from 2005 until his death in May 2013.
[136] Mustafa Mohsini is former Jamiat commander, police chief in Logar, deputy head of operations in ministry of interior and since October 2013 police chief in Kunduz.
[137] The ANP were largely made up of a coterie of private militias belonging to commanders from Andarab.
[138] Mullah Alam is a former Hizb commander-turned-Pashtun tribal leader in Pul-e-Khumri.
[139] Alam Jan is the deputy head of provincial council and former Hizb commander in Baghlan-e-Jadid.
[140] Nurul Haq is a former arbaki and ALP commander in Pul-e-Khumri.
[141] Local militias supported by the government in the north were commonly referred to as *arbaki*.
[142] For a critical conceptualisation of security in conflict zones see (Luckham and Kirk 2013, 341).
[143] The Pashtuns had little trust in predatory government forces, which is one reason why Pashtun powerbrokers sought a local arbaki force to ensure their own security.

security regimes.[144] They were distrustful of local Pashtuns and suspected them of harbouring sympathy for Taliban insurgents. Pashtun militias were perceived as a coercive threat to the dominance of Andarabi commanders and their disproportionate control over government forces, which many Pashtuns considered as illegitimate.[145]

The first part of this chapter examines the conflict dynamics and power struggles in the years preceding the formation of arbaki and ALP militias in Baghlan. This sets the stage for a discussion of the local insurgency and the rise of 'counterinsurgents', first as arbaki and later as ALP militias. I then turn to some of the problematic aspects of the ALP process. I reproduce the account of an armed confrontation in Pul-e-Khumri involving the ANP and ALP to illustrate how the contestation is really about competition for power and access to resources or reinforcing the status quo and the existing norms of power relations, and attempts to protect local clients and weaken rivals. In the concluding section, I summarise the key findings and analysis of some of the contradictory and perverse effects of the ALP intervention in Baghlan.

II. A changing political landscape

The historical sedimentation of power in Baghlan is closely linked to the arrival of Pashtun migrants in the nineteenth century. In the 1850s Baghlan served as a penal colony for Pashtun political dissidents exiled from southern and eastern Afghanistan (Barfield 1978; Bleuer 2012). During the reign of Abdul Rahman Khan (1880-1901) additional waves of Pashtun settlers arrived from southern and eastern Afghanistan. Some moved there voluntarily while others were bribed or coerced. The settlers were granted government subsidies and land grants as part of a state-led economic development plan involving irrigation and agriculture development schemes to increase state revenues. In addition to economic motives, the resettlements were undertaken for geostrategic and political reasons: to thwart Russian territorial designs on lands this side of the Oxus River and to create pockets of Pashtun populations in the north loyal to the central government

[144] Interview # 11.
[145] Interview # 63.

(N. Tapper 1983). Until the 1960s, Baghlan was part of the greater Qataghan or Afghan Turkistan region. Following the 1964 administrative reforms, Baghlan acquired the status of a province. It is located 250 kilometres north of Kabul and straddles two strategic highways, connecting it to Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif. The province is composed of fifteen districts; the provincial capital is in Pul-e-Khumri.[146] It has an ethnically mixed population of nearly 850,000, including a substantial number of Pashtuns.[147] The main source of wealth is derived from agriculture boosted by the water sources of the Baghlan-Kunduz river system and proximity to markets in Balkh and Kabul. Before the war, modest industrial enterprises, notably the Ghori cement factory, the sugar and cotton mills, and coalmines had made Baghlan into an important industrial zone.

The political and security dynamics in the 1980s and early 1990s hold the key to understanding the post-2001 political architecture in this strategic province. Baghlan was a major transit route used by Soviet forces to resupply Kabul and southern Afghanistan. Then as now, the government armed local militias to ensure security along the route and prevent mujahedin attacks on the supply convoys. Since the formation of ethnic militias under President Babrak Karmal in the mid-1980s, Baghlan was ruled by the ethnic militias of Sayed Mansoor Naderi, an Ismaili spiritual leader from Doshi district. His son, Sayed Jafar Naderi had started a pro-government *qaumi* militia regiment in 1984, which was later upgraded to a regular army division, the 80th infantry division. In 1992 it consisted of 18,000 men and equipped with heavy artillery and tanks. Throughout this period, Naderi had maintained good relations with the mujahedin opposition, notably the Jamiat military commander Ahmad Shah Masoud in the adjacent Panjshir valley. In exchange for allowing the mujahedin to take their cut from military supplies intended for Kabul, the Ismaili clan had managed to maintain themselves in Pul-e-Khumri. With the fall of President Najibullah's government in 1992, the power structure in Pul-e-Khumri

[146] In the 1980s the mujahedin resistance increased military pressure on Soviet and Afghan forces located in the provincial capital, Baghlan-e-Jadid. In response the capital was relocated to Pul-e-Khumri where it has remained to the present day. In 2005 Governor Humdard tried to relocate the capital to Baghlan-e-Jadid, but faced stiff resistance form Andarabi strongmen who felt secure in Pul-e-Khumri and did not want to relocate to a majority Pashtun district.

[147] The population in Baghlan is composed of Tajik (52%), Pashtun (20%), Hazara (15%) and Uzbek (9%). The Jamiat-affiliated Tajiks dominate the mountainous south, east and west of the province while Pashtuns linked to Hizb live in the fertile valleys in central and northern Baghlan. The Ismaili community of Sayed Mansoor Naderi dominated the Doshi district and Uzbeks loyal to Dostum resided in northern Baghlan.

also changed. Baghlan was among the first pro-government militia-led garrison towns to join the mujahedin in a local power sharing arrangement (B. R. Rubin 1995; Giustozzi 2009b). Naderi's main base of supporter after Najibullah was the Uzbek warlord in Balkh, Abdul Rashid Dostum.[148] With Dostum's backing, Naderi's militias worked out a power sharing deal with local mujahedin commanders associated with Jamiat and Hizb. As a result the various mujahedin factions were absorbed into existing political and military structures of the former regime. This coalition government of former regime militias and mujehedin factions ruled Baghlan until the Taliban take over of power in 1997. Local Jamiat and Hizb commanders frequently contested Naderi's control of Baghlan in the early 1990s.

As elsewhere in the country, the newly victorious mujahedin commanders and militia leaders carved out the countryside and imposed the arbitrary rule of the gun. Every small and big time commander became a de facto ruler of his area, a period most Afghans remember as the time of *topakian* (gunmen). Kabul, where the fighting lasted from 1992 to 1996, saw the worst of the militias' reign of terror, notably Dostum's Gelamjam militias.[149] In Baghlan, as in other provinces, the spheres of authority of local commanders often overlapped, dividing valleys and strategic roads, which frequently resulted in armed clashes. For instance, various sections of the Pul-e-Khumri-Baghlan-e-Jadid road were controlled by different local militias. The section nearest to Pul-e-Khumri was under the sway of Naderi's militias; Haji Nawab, a former pro-government militia commander set up a roadblock mid-way between the two district centres; Hizb and Dostum's militias controlled the end part closest to Baghlan-e-Jadid's town centre. Each armed group took its own share of the road tax, including a share of the supplies destined for the government in Kabul, headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani.[150] The militia factions, cut off from outside patronage turned their guns on each other in a quest to

[148] Dostum is leader of Junbish-e-Mili, an Uzbek political party active in northern Afghanistan. He began his military career in the 1980s as commander of a pro-government militia in Jawzjan province. In subsequent years, his militia unit expanded into a fully-fledged army division with thousands of fighters and heavy weapons, and played a key role in the factional conflicts in Kabul in the early 1990s. On Junbish's military and political development, see (Giustozzi 2009b).
[149] Besides Gelamjam militias, other militias belonging to Sayyaf, Masoud and the Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari were responsible for most of the atrocities against civilians in Kabul.
[150] Interview # 54.

maintain control of strategic roads and other sources of rent. When in 1992 the US and Soviet Union stopped the flow of military and economic aid to their respective clients, commanders on both sides, government and insurgents, were forced to 'privatise' their activities to generate rents from local economic resources. As a result, a localised conflict economy emerged in the 1990s that revolved around the physical control of major trade and logistics routes, border crossing points and customs and mines and opium harvesting areas. It involved the extraction of rents by military commanders, including by robbing merchants, setting up roadblocks and shaking down travellers and taxing smuggled goods on the local highways. In short, localised and regionalised war economies run by militia commanders emerged to replace the missing patronage from foreign powers (B. R. Rubin 2000; Goodhand 2005; Giustozzi 2007).

Alliance making and scrambles for power were common during this period – reflecting the behaviour of most armed groups during the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s.[151] In the face of perpetual instability, civilians also hedged their bets. Local commanders were also drawn into broader conflicts involving competition between Jamiat, Hizb and Junbish in the northern region and in Kabul. For instance, in the midst of factional fighting in Kabul in 1994, the Dostum-Masoud alliance against Hizb unraveled. In its place a new alliance between Hizb and Junbish was forged, and for the next two years their forces fought against Masoud's Shura-e-Nizar militias. The change in military alliances in Kabul prompted the renegotiation of the elite pact in Baghlan to reflect the relationships among armed groups in Kabul. Two years later the feuding mujahedin factions lost Kabul to the Taliban, and relocated their militias further north across the Hindu Kush mountains. Now gathered in Mazar-i-Sharif, Junbish and Hizb joined forces with Jamiat to resist the Taliban's military advance into northern Afghanistan. This loose coalition of mujahedin factions on the run from the Taliban became the Northern Alliance. With a long history of internal rivalries, power struggles among local commanders soon erupted. One such scramble for power involved the powerful Uzbek warlord Dostum and one of his

[151] During the anti-Soviet jihad, political loyalties frequently shifted back and forth not only between various mujahedin groups but also between the mujahedin and pro-government militias (B. R. Rubin 1995; Dorronsoro 2005; Giustozzi 2009b). The main consideration for local commanders was securing supply of arms and money from mujahedin parties in Pakistan - they mainly followed the flow of patronage and arms, shifting political loyalties accordingly (Gopal 2014b).

deputies, Abdul Malik. In 1997 in a move to get rid of Dostum and assume leadership of Junbish, Malik invited the Taliban to Mazar-i-Sharif, but soon reneged on the deal and in a surprise attack, which also involved local Hazara militias, reportedly killed hundreds, perhaps thousands of unsuspecting Taliban fighters. The remaining Taliban forces retreated south to Baghlan, but once there they were unable to get to Kabul because Salang Pass, the only transportation route to the capital had been blocked by Northern Alliance troops. Under pressure, Governor Bashir Baghlani, a powerful Hizb commander from Pul-e-Khumri defected to the Taliban.[152] In a desperate move to end the blockade, thousands of Taliban fighters stormed neighbouring Kunduz, home to a large Pashtun population in northern Afghanistan. In Kunduz, the Taliban established their northern military command until the US military intervention ousted them from power.

As in other parts of the north, the US military in 2001 relied on Northern Alliance commanders and militiamen to topple the Taliban. In Baghlan, Jamiat commanders from Andarab played a crucial role in giving chase to Taliban fighters. Some of the Taliban's own local allies, such as commander Amir Gul abandoned the Taliban's cause and joined the Northern Alliance in the final stages of the battle. In a familiar pattern, America's local allies in the global war on terror reaped the political and economic benefits associated with the fall of the Taliban and the US military's presence afterwards. The intervention had paved the way for Jamiat-linked commanders' ascent to power in Baghlan. However, when they got to Pul-e-Khumri, the provincial capital had fallen under the control of a rival group: Sayed Mansoor Naderi's Ismaili militias. In the ensuing scramble for power, Jamiat commanders from Andarab received crucial support from a number of local Hizb-e-Islami commanders, many of whom had only recently abandoned the Taliban's cause and joined the Northern Alliance. This coalition of Jamiat and Hizb commanders, with American support, defeated Naderi's militias and assumed control in Pul-e-Khumri. The group of Hizb commanders that joined Jamiat in the battle of Pul-e-Khumri included Mullah Alam and Amir Gul, who later became the governor of Baghla-e-Jadid. Other Hizb commanders fought on the opposing side of Jamiat. Nurul

[152] Bashir Baghlani replaced Jafar Naderi, a Dostum ally as governor in June 1997. Fighting between Jafar and Hizb militias erupted in March 1996 and resulted in hundreds dead and wounded.

Haq's father, a Hizb commander in Dand-e-Shahabuddin sided with Naderi's forces and was subsequently marginalised.[153]

The Andarabi commanders at the head of this coalition occupied most of the powerful positions in the local administration, especially in the security sector. A period of power consolidation and wealth accumulation by the new office holders followed, which excluded key Hizb commanders like Mullah Alam from government, even though he had played a crucial role in the Andarabi commanders' rise to power. This meant that an expanding web of patronage-based appointments of Andarabi officials were effectively cutting off other communities, in particular the Pashtuns from access to government positions and rent seeking opportunities. Pashtun powerbrokers linked to Hizb did not immediately contest the new political dispensation because of their prior alliance with the Taliban. Like elsewhere in the country, those who had previous links with Taliban had to tread carefully. US Special Forces, with a clear mission from Washington to eradicate the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, depended mainly on anti-Taliban strongmen to provide the intelligence they needed to carry out counterterrorism operations. With this incentive structure in place, American forces and their Afghan proxies routinely targeted former Taliban leaders and their local allies. Many powerbrokers in the south and the east supplied spurious intelligence to US forces, accusing their rivals of links with Taliban and Al Qaeda, in an attempt to sideline opponents and capture power and resources. Therefore, any aggressive move to challenge the power of Jamiat commanders, now closely aligned behind the US war on terror would certainly have invited US military retaliation against Hizb-linked commanders in Baghlan.

With privileged access to the Northern Alliance defence minister and vice president Fahim Qasim, a close US ally, the Andarabi commanders had a powerful hand to play in shaping the local politics in Baghlan. But this also meant that the Pashtun powerbrokers had to cultivate their own relations with the Americans and Pashtun elites in the central government. Meanwhile, a period of primitive accumulation[154] got underway. Since the

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[153] Nurul Haq later became a powerful ALP commander.

[154] In classical political economy rendering of primitive accumulation, state violence played a crucial role for the original accumulation to occur. See (Marx 1976, 1: Chapter 26).

Andarabi commanders lacked a local powerbase in Pul-e-Khumri (which they hadn't previously ruled), anxieties about their own unstable position and limited control led them to take aggressive steps to weaken the power of potential rivals, including former allies belonging to Hizb. Disarming rivals effectively rendered them powerless and unable to defend themselves against future attacks. Harassment of local Pashtuns by government forces, notably the provincial police dominated by Andarabi militias began. Soon the police were carrying out aggressive disarmament campaigns in and around Pul-e-Khumri, targeting Hizb commanders and local villagers. Government forces justified these raids under the guise of clearing the remnants of Taliban and Al Qaeda from Baghlan. In the south it was a common practice by the new power holders in Karzai's government, often at the behest of US Special Forces, to target former Taliban and their local allies and demand the surrender of their weapons. Supplying intelligence and killing and capturing Taliban commanders became a lucrative business for many local powerbrokers fighting alongside American forces. Using such pretexts, Andarabi commanders in the security forces frequently conducted 'disarmament' raids in Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori areas of Pul-e-Khumri. The raids were lucrative as there were weapons to be requisitioned, local elders to be shaken down, and reward money to be collected. When the locals had surrendered their weapons, and the police kept coming for more, many villagers were forced to purchase weapons in the local market and then handed them to the government. Those who could not afford to buy new weapons were detained and tortured until their families had scrambled enough to secure their release from prison, or were handed over to the Americans. As noted by Gopal (2014a), punitive raids and the torture and detention of Taliban leaders in the south eventually galvanised former Taliban commanders, long after they had surrendered and declared allegiance to the Karzai administration, to regroup and launch a deadly insurgency against the US-backed government and foreign forces. Villagers and Hizb commanders in Pul-e-Khumri described similar incidents of abusive behaviour by government forces and local powerbrokers. The Hizb-led insurgency erupted in the same areas of Pul-e-Khumri where government forces had earlier carried out disarmament raids targeting Pashtun communities. As far as the local Pashtuns were concerned the insurgency was an act of

rebellion against unjust rulers. In years to come, the arbaki and ALP militias would also emerge from the same soil.

Such power struggles help explain the political instability in Baghlan and the frequent change of governors and other senior officials, as each side tried to expand its influence at the expense of rivals. They were a consequence of an exclusive and imperfect local political settlement that did not reflect the actual distribution of coercion and material resources. Most of the Pashtun powerbrokers that were excluded from power in 2001 had ruled their areas during the Taliban. Considering their economic power and proximity to Pul-e-Khumri, Pashtun commanders and politicians had greater access to government power and resources even before the Taliban compared to the new rulers. In fact the Andarabis had never before held so much power in Baghlan. As it happened, a previously insignificant military power backed by Jamiat strongmen in the central government succeeded in consolidating its hold over the seat of power in the province. As a result of a complex web of relationships, in particular with Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor and Northern Alliance heavyweights in Kabul, Mustafa and his brother Rasoul Mohsini emerged as powerful figures in Baghlan's political landscape. Like powerbrokers in the south, they succeeded in accumulating power and wealth by establishing themselves as the nodal point in the patronage networks that dominated provincial politics, business, international contracting, drugs and the means of coercion through commander-networks (Forsberg 2010). With near monopoly over the local administration and government positions, they folded their militias into the security organs and successfully avoided the UN-sponsored DDR programme. As a result, the ANP became the exclusive domain of Andarabi commanders and their militias. Even by the end of the decade the ANP was not much more than a rag-tag coterie of local militias loyal to Andarabi commanders (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011, 18). In addition to control over the security apparatus, the political leadership was also drawn from the ranks of Jamiat. Alongside Mir Alam as the provincial police chief, the appointment of a Jamiat-linked governor in 2005 'reinforced the Tajik dominance within the province' (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2005). A Pashtun reformist governor, Mohammad Akbar Barakzai was appointed in 2009. However, Barakzai's authority was constantly flouted by Kabir Andarabi, the provincial police chief. Previously, another Pashtun governor, Juma Khan Hamdard was literally chased

out of power when he attempted to relocate the provincial capital to Baghlan-e-Jadid, a predominantly Pashtun district and Hizb stronghold.

The influence of Andarabi commanders in the security sector was considerable. As head of the Highway Police in 2003, Gen. Khalil Andarabi awarded two thirds of all senior positions in the Highway Police to his supporters from Andarab, 90 percent of whom were Tajik, and only one Pashtun (ibid 2005). During Mir Alam's, and later Kabir Andarabi's tenure as provincial police chief – in 2005 and 2009 respectively - the police were primarily drawn from Jamiat supporters.[155] According to a provincial council member, the total ANP force in Baghlan in 2009 numbered some 1,800 policemen, only thirty of whom were Pashtun.[156] The provincial ANP headquarters, the Komandani, was staffed by forty-six senior officers, six of whom were junior Pashtun officers. The Tajik commanders in the security forces were riven by factionalism. Gen. Khalil Andarabi[157] and Mir Alam were allegedly involved in rival drug trafficking networks in the northeast. As a result of this dynamic, 'the rivalry between the ANP and the highway police' was intense. The US Embassy in Kabul argued that 'rather than providing stability, the police forces are among the principal destabilizing factors in the province' (ibid 2005).

Over the years, central government reforms, supported by donors attempted to shake up the dominance of Andarabis over the police force but achieved little success. For instance, selective appointments to senior positions were used by the central government to push certain reforms through and balance competing power centres. It was in light of this strategy that in April 2010, Gen. Abdul Rahman Rahimi, a professional Pashtun police officer was appointed as provincial chief of police. His appointment came after Jamiat strongmen Mir Alam, Abdul Rahman Sayedkhaili and Kabir Andarabi, all three of them had risen to prominence as jihadi commanders and had given the police in Baghlan a strong Tajik-Andarabi identity.[158] Although Gen. Rahimi's appointment signalled the change of leadership at the top, the rank and file of the provincial police force remained

[155] Under Mir Alam, 75 percent of district police chiefs were followers of Jamiat and loyal to the Andarabi faction. According to US Embassy estimates, the breakdown of senior leadership in the Baghlan police was 86 percent Tajik and 14 percent Pashtun (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2005).
[156] Interview # 63. In 2012 the ANP *tashkil* in Baghlan was around 2,500 policemen.
[157] Khalil Andarabi is a former military officer who served in Naderi's pro-government militia in the 1980s.
[158] Interview # 15.

loyal to Kabir Andarabi and Mustafa and Rasoul Mohsini. His subsequent efforts to reform the Andarabi-dominated police force, unsurprisingly, produced few tangible results.

III. The many faces of the insurgency

By the summer of 2009 the insurgency had spread to most parts of Baghlan. The rerouting of NATO supplies through northern Afghanistan after attacks on its convoys increased in Pakistan enhanced the strategic significance of Baghlan for both NATO and the insurgents. This resulted in increased Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami military operations in Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori areas of Pul-e-Khumri[159] aimed at disrupting NATO logistics. Moreover, political marginalisation and persecution of local Pashtuns also played a part in the emergence of the insurgency in Baghlan. The Taliban, it has been argued, routinely exploited local factionalism and formed alliances with weaker factions against stronger ones to consolidate their position in the north. In provinces dominated by non-Pashtuns, the Taliban also worked with the clergy to transcend ethnic divisions, rather than solely relying on the grievances of disaffected Pashtuns to organise local recruits for the insurgency. There is, however, a need for caution when the Taliban insurgency is explained as a southern insurgency that expanded and took roots in the north with the help of local Hizb-e-Islami proxies (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011). It lumps together the Taliban and Hizb insurgencies, which are dissimilar in many ways. The two groups have different worldviews when it comes to relations with the government and development activities. It de-politicises local power struggles involving Hizb powerbrokers which are primarily about access to governmental power and resources, and does not share, at least in Baghlan, the same aim as the broader Taliban insurgency; the overthrow of the new order. In fact the two groups have been involved in frequent armed clashes, particularly in Pul-e-Khumri and Baghlan-e-Jadid. Similarly, Nerkh district in Wardak province has been a hotbed of armed clashes between Taliban and Hizb fighters for many years (chapter 6). The Taliban's overall aim has been to weaken

[159] The Kabul-Kunduz and Kabul-Mazar-i-Sharif highways traverse these areas.

Hizb's once dominant position in the insurgency in the two provinces, and is connected to the struggle of the two groups for military and ideological supremacy in the jihad against foreign forces.

The first signs of insecurity appeared in the spring of 2009 in Pul-e-Khumri and Baghlan-e-Jadid. The situation deteriorated further in the lead up to the August presidential elections. For example, in Dand-e-Ghori, suspected Taliban fighters attacked police patrols and captured police vehicles and ammunition without much resistance. Local powerbrokers, such as Mullah Alam believed the attacks against police convoys and the capture of vehicles and weapons were orchestrated by local power holders aligned with regional strongman and Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor. Allegedly, Atta had planned to create insecurity (by arming local militias and labelling them Taliban) so pro-Karzai voting could not take place in Pashtun areas of Baghlan. This was supposed to smooth his ally Abdullah Abdullah's electoral victory in the north.[160] Elections tend to intensify power struggles between rival armed groups and shorten cycles of political alliances between local powerbrokers and elites in the central government (Giustozzi and Orsini 2009). For example, Jamiat's power base was split between the two leading candidates in the above-mentioned election. Former defence minister and vice president Fahim Qasim's decision to back Karzai split the Northern Alliance opposition and weakened Abdullah, adding significant political and financial clout to Karzai's re-election bid. However, he lost the support of governor Atta, who had played a crucial role in securing the northern vote for him in 2004. In 2009, he threw his support behind Abdullah and played the role of a spoiler. Local observers noted that 'because of insecurity presidential elections did not really take place in Pashtun areas' in Baghlan.[161] Similarly, during the September 2010 parliamentary elections, security in Pashtun areas had deteriorated so much that the authorities did not hold elections in Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-e-Shahabuddin. Only about nine to ten polling stations remained open in Baghlan-e-Jadid. As a result the majority of Pashtun inhabitants of Baghlan could not cast their

[160] Interview # 9, 18.10.2011 and 28.05.2012.
[161] Interview # 14, 31.03.2012.

votes.[162] In response to insecurity, the government decided to form so called 'election militias' to ensure voting in Pashtun areas, including in the restive south.[163]

Security continued to deteriorate after the elections. In November 2009, the Taliban felt confident enough to try a military take over of Baghlan-e-Jadid. Hundreds of Taliban fighters stormed the district centre and the home of the district governor in a conventional-style military attack. The attack was repulsed after the district governor, Amir Gul, asked his former Hizb-e-Islami commanders for help against the Taliban. A jihadi militia of more than four hundred, many of whom had successfully avoided the UN-supported DDR programme, fought pitched battles lasting for days before the government regained control of the district.[164] According to Abdul Rahman Rahimi – the police chief of Baghlan from April 2010 to September 2011 – in the spring of 2010, the Taliban's influence had reached the centre of Pul-e-Khumri. They regularly infiltrated the city at night and launched random attacks on government posts and then withdrew without much resistance. The central government attempted to stabilise security ahead of elections and initially relied on the ANP. However, the ANP had been an ill-disciplined force of local militias linked to Andarabi commanders and was poorly resourced and unwilling to fight the Taliban.[165] This partly led to government reliance on 'election militias' to facilitate voting in insecure areas. Around the time of parliamentary elections in 2010, the arrival of US troops marked growing NATO concerns about the situation in the north. Although Baghlan was of strategic importance to NATO, there had been a limited presence of Afghan or foreign forces in the province. A small contingent of the Hungarian military had taken over the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in 2006, but it lacked both the political will and the financial and military resources to aggressively police large parts of the province or take on the Taliban. Eventually, the status quo changed with the arrival of US Special Forces in late 2010. As a result of aggressive night raids and kill-capture operations, NATO was no longer seen as

[162] Interview # 40.
[163] Most of the 'election militias', said to be around 10,000, disbanded after the elections. See (HRW 2011).
[164] Interview # 68.
[165] Interview # 15.

irrelevant. Sustained attacks against their leadership considerably weakened the Taliban in Baghlan and Kunduz (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011).

IV. The emergence of arbaki militias

Insurgent attacks against Pul-e-Khumri mostly originated from Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-e-Shahabuddin, both traditional Hizb strongholds located a few kilometres to the north, on each side of the Baghlan-Mazar and Baghlan-Kunduz highways. These lush and densely populated plains turned into the staging grounds for attacks on NATO convoys destined for Kabul. By this time – in the spring of 2009 – the Taliban insurgents had a strong military presence and frequently carried out night-time attacks in Pul-e-Khumri. Considering the strategic significance of unfettered flow of supplies to NATO's overall mission – without regular supplies reaching the PRTs and hundreds of Forward Operating Bases in remote and inaccessible locations throughout the country there would be no NATO mission (Gopal 2014a) - insurgent attacks designed to disrupt the supply chain resulted in counter-attacks from government and NATO forces. In less than a decade, the war returned to Pul-e-Khumri as it turned into a major battleground for US counterinsurgency. The pressure on the local villagers intensified as demands for recruits, weapons, *ushr*,[166] food and shelter increased, not just from Taliban insurgents but also predatory armed groups. One group in particular, consisting of a handful of local vigilantes, would play a key role in reconfiguring the security landscape in Pul-e-Khumri. The genesis of pro-government militias has been traced back to this band of local fighters. In contrast to Wardak, where the US military and the Afghan government played a central role in forming local militias, pro-government militias in Baghlan sprung from the local soil, initially without any links to the government or foreign forces.

There are multiple interpretations of how the first group of arbaki militias emerged in Pul-e-Khumri. Most accounts converge on the role of local fighters under commander Sher and his deputy Nurul Haq. Around the same time as NATO supplies started flowing

[166] Equivalent to 10% Islamic tax on agricultural produce.

through Pul-e-Khumri, Sher's band of fighters reportedly operated a protection racket in Dand-e-Shahabuddin and engaged in kidnapping and illegal taxation of farmers. The group had no formal affiliation with the insurgency or Hizb-e-Islami, which they subsequently adopted. In early 2009, just as the AP3 had got underway in Wardak province (chapter 6), perhaps encouraged by the news that the government was setting up local militias in insecure areas, commander Sher approached the governor, NDS and police chief with the idea of forming an anti-Taliban militia in his village. The Taliban were pressuring local villagers to close down schools and clinics and stop working for the government and NGOs. Infringements of these demands were reportedly punished by a violent campaign of beatings, assassinations and destruction of property. Sher and his men volunteered to fight the Taliban and put an end to their brutalities. However, the local administration dominated by Jamiat-linked Andarabi commanders rejected this offer. There was great unease about arming local Pashtuns who had been marginalised from power for so long. It would have compromised the dominant position of the Andarabi commanders in the local security architecture. At the time the interior ministry had no plans to expand the AP3 to other provinces. The Pashtun governor of Baghlan also lacked the required resources to set up local defence groups modelled on the AP3. Governor Barakzai might have encouraged Sher and his group to form an anti-Taliban militia in Dand-e-Shahabuddin. To gain legitimacy and attract resources, Sher reportedly adopted the label of Hizb-e-Islami. It remains unclear whether by adopting the Hizb banner he changed his mind about fighting the Taliban, espousing the insurgent group's ideology and its fight against government and NATO forces, or whether he was only interested in ensuring the survival of his armed group with no real intention of fighting for one side or the other. There were speculations that the Hizb label was instrumentalised to gain access to the government's peace and reintegration programme, launched in early 2010, as a steppingstone to joining government-backed arbaki militias. There have been some linkages between the insurgency, the peace and reintegration programme and government-backed militias. Research indicated that the majority of reintegrees lacked security guarantees and employment opportunities after defecting to the government. To overcome the problem of security and unemployment, reintegrees typically opted to join government-backed militias such as the ALP (Derksen 2011, 2). It

appears that Sher adopted the Hizb label in order to qualify as an insurgent, and then approached the government with the offer of reconciliation, and in due course hoped to set up his own arbaki militia.[167] As the events described below illustrate, that more or less was how the plan unfolded.

The self-appointed Hizb fighters under Sher and the Taliban tolerated each other's presence for some time. They agreed on the division of territory and rents, which was mainly obtained from taxing local farmers under the Islamic practice of *ushr*. As in Wardak, initially Hizb was in a stronger military position in Baghlan. Hizb fighters were in control of Dand-e-Shahabuddin where Sher and Nurul Haq's fighters operated. The Taliban positions were located further north, between Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Baghlan-e-Jadid. After a brief period of co-existence, the deal collapsed and fighting commenced. The most plausible explanation centred on the Taliban's overall aim of expanding and monopolising the insurgency and weakening rival centres of power. The flow of NATO supplies through Baghlan at some point passed through Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori areas, which inflated their strategic value not only for Taliban but also NATO forces. The Taliban reportedly poured in money, weapons and leadership to northern Baghlan to strengthen its military capabilities in preparation for escalating attacks on NATO supply lines. That meant Hizb, which was suspected of links with the government,[168] had to be cleared out of those parts in order to bring them under Taliban control. In March 2010, the Taliban attacked Sher and his men. Hundreds of Taliban fighters, including reinforcements from Kunduz reportedly attacked a group of around seventy Hizb fighters. As it happened, Sher's fighters were easily defeated.[169] In the wake of this humiliating defeat, they surrendered their weapons, joined the government's peace and reintegration programme and re-joined their families who had taken shelter in Pul-e-

[167] Interview # 10.
[168] Governor Barakazi reportedly held sympathy for Hizb-e-Islami. To weaken the insurgency, he planned to break Hizb away from the Taliban and reconcile it with the government. Similarly, in Wardak, Governor Fidai tried to reach out to Hizb fighters in Nerkh to break them away from the Taliban, with offers of reconciliation and the possibility of forming ALP militias.
[169] Interview # 40.

Khumri.[170] The 'reconciled' fighters were given temporary government shelter and some basic assistance, but not much else.[171]

After six months in Pul-e-Khumri, small groups of fighters and their families began to return to their villages. They were followed by a group of forty of Sher's men, encouraged by the newly arrived US Special Forces to return to their villages ahead of the parliamentary elections in September and start another attempt to confront the Taliban. Apparently, Alam Jan, member of provincial council and US Special Forces helped them get back the weapons they had surrendered to the government. Security for the upcoming elections may have played a part in this decision. This attempt provided the basis for a more ambitious plan to set up arbaki militias in other parts of Baghlan. Governor Barakzai and Alam Jan played an important role in developing the arbaki plan. The scheme had multiple objectives, including weakening the Taliban, strengthening local Pashtuns and balancing the Andarabi powerbrokers' dominance of the security forces.[172] The arbaki militias initially relied on local villagers for support, but over time they resorted to more coercive tactics to extract resources, including through forced taxation of farmers. Otherwise, they lacked regular government support, which is one explanation for why such militias regularly abused the local population and committed human rights abuses. The German military knew that the arbaki forces they worked with regularly engaged in criminal activities. A Spiegel report quoted a German military officer saying 'none of these men are angels. Until recently, Sher and his men used brutal methods, including the threat of slicing off ears, noses and heads, to exact protection money from their victims' (Demmer 2010). Subsequently, US Special Forces became the main source of support for arbaki and later ALP militias.

When the arbaki fighters returned to Dand-e-Shahabuddin, the Taliban reaction was swift. On 17 September 2010, a day before the parliamentary elections, a large group of Taliban attacked Sher and his band of arbaki militias, who were ill equipped to confront a better-armed Taliban. The battle, which came to be known as the 'Battle of Shahabuddin' lasted for three days but his request for military assistance from the government went un-

[170] Interview # 18.
[171] Interview # 10.
[172] Interview # 14, 31.03.2012.

answered. Sher then turned to the German military,[173] telling them 'we need more weapons… If we don't have weapons, the Taliban will slit our throats' (ibid 2010). According to Nurul Haq, who took part in the fighting, there were more than five hundred Taliban against thirty of his fighters. Nurul Haq claims that he contacted the provincial chief of police for military supplies, but 'he kept making excuses' (Mogelson 2011). He then went to the Americans for help.[174] They responded to his call for help. The Americans offered air support and encouraged the local fighters to fight on. However, the promise of air support did not immediately materialise and only towards the end of the third day when the local fighters had run out of ammunition, the Americans finally called in air support.[175] The air strike killed Sher and half a dozen of his fighters. His friends and family maintain that he was killed deliberately, apparently to stop him from surrendering to the Taliban after he had lost hope of receiving support from government and NATO forces.[176]

V. From death to resurrection: arbaki's transition to ALP

With Sher's death, the arbaki chapter in Pul-e-Khumri had closed. But the controversy surrounding the formation of local militias was not over yet. From the ashes of the Battle of Shahabuddin a bolder and more ambitious agenda emerged. A month earlier, the Afghan government had approved the ALP programme that enabled the nation-wide expansion of local militias supported by the US military. The ALP had emerged in response to government anxieties about the ad-hoc and highly decentralised nature of US military support to local militias who had few, if any, links to Afghan government institutions (chapter 5). Under the ALP framework, all existing US-supported local militias were integrated into the policing structure of the interior ministry. The implementation of the ALP in Baghlan occurred shortly after it had been approved. The

[173] The German military established a 126-man military presence in the spring of 2010 in Baghlan-e-Jadid district. Insurgents from Baghlan frequently carried out operations in southern Kunduz and then retreated to their bases in northern Baghlan. The German military, based in Kunduz, dispatched a Quick Reaction Force contingent to Baghlan to contain the insurgency.
[174] A month earlier a team of US Special Forces had set up a base in Dand-e-Shahabuddin.
[175] Interview # 55.
[176] Interview # 54.

plan provided for the establishment of ALP not only in Pul-e-Khumri, but also in other insecure areas in central and northern Baghlan. The ALP tashkil (administrative structure) provided for the recruitment of nine hundred local militias in three districts: Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dahan-e-Ghori. Each district was allocated three hundred ALP recruits. Although the ALP guidelines included elaborate arrangements for local shuras and government institutions at sub-national level to recruit and supervise local fighters, in practice they played a limited role in the process. From the very beginning US Special Forces and commanders of local armed groups dominated the ALP process in Baghlan. The first ALP unit that was established in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, sometime in February 2011, consisting mainly of remnants of the arbaki force, which had served under Sher and Nurul Haq. In spite of suffering a humiliating defeat, and with the backing of US Special Forces, the arbaki militia became Shahabuddin's new local police. Nurul Haq was appointed commander of the new ALP force. According to an influential powerbroker from Pul-e-Khumri, the provincial council, local shuras and elders had not been consulted about the decision:

> *After the battle of Shahabuddin, the government and foreign forces provided support to commander Sher's remaining fighters so that in the future they were better prepared to fight the Taliban and secure their territory. They were nominated as the local police and given a base in Shahabuddin. Initially, US Special Forces stayed with them in the base and conducted joint operations against Taliban. Once Sher's remaining fighters had emerged as the local police, there was no room for consulting local elders or gathering the villagers to solicit their opinion on the matter. Since these fighters had fought the Taliban, it was natural that they should be asked to provide local security*.[177]

Embedded US Special Forces built new bases and checkpoints and began joint operations with arbaki-turned-ALP militias. The arbaki/ALP could now get access to regular pay and supplies, and most important US military backing if attacked by the Taliban. The close relationship with US Special Force made Nurul Haq a formidable military and political force in Baghlan. A militia force of around seven hundred local recruits was gradually built up and deployed in the strategically important areas of Dand-e-

[177] Interview # 56.

Shahabuddin, Dand-e-Ghori and Baghlan-e-Jadid. The coercive power of US troops and the growing strength of arbaki/ALP militias led to some improvements in the security situation in Pul-e-Khumri and along the Baghlan-Kunduz and Baghlan-Mazar highways used for NATO supplies. Pro-government militias played a crucial role in 'holding' those areas that had been previously cleared from Taliban insurgents. But they played a limited role in the initial military operations designed to push back and take territory from the Taliban. The provincial police chief at the time argued that the Afghan national army and police in collaboration with US Special Forces played a critical role in expelling Taliban insurgents from central and northern Baghlan. The government increased the number of police patrols and checkpoints in those parts of Pul-e-Khumri city where the Taliban had established control. The checkpoints proved effective in improving security, and the security cordon was then gradually expanded north to Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori areas of Pul-e-Khumri. However, because of the shortage of the regular police and especially the low representation of Pashtuns in the Tajik dominated ANP – which had resulted in a generally high distrust of government forces – the responsibility for manning police checkpoint in those areas was delegated to the newly formed local police.[178] The security situation gradually improved as a result of these measures. According to a local observer, in 2009 and 2010 the roads to Kunduz and Mazar were 'impossible to travel on'.[179] Subsequently, both the roads became safe for travel, including at night. For the first time in many years, regular travel within Pul-e-Khumri and to former insurgent strongholds in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, Dand-e-Ghori and Dahana-e-Ghori had become possible for civilians.[180] Most fighting in Baghlan ended after the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

As demonstrated in the case of Dand-e-Shahabuddin in Pul-e-Khumri, the arbaki and subsequently the ALP mainly consisted of former insurgents like Sher and Nurul Haq. This trend continued as the ALP expanded to other parts of Baghlan. Many insurgents defected to the government following escalation in night raids conducted by US Special Forces in late 2010 and early 2011. I was able to verify this during my fieldwork in May

[178] Interview # 15.
[179] Interview # 40.
[180] Interview # 57.

2012 in Pul-e-Khumri. I interviewed two newly recruited young ALP fighters from Dand-e-Shahabuddin outside the ANP headquarters. They were waiting for their turn to undergo the mandatory ALP validation process, which involved blood and urine tests and biometric eye scan, before their annual contracts were renewed. Without any attempt to conceal it, they admitted to having been, until quite recently, with the Taliban. Before leaving the insurgency, the two fighters had taken part in a number of military operations against American and government forces. When US night raids increased the military pressure, they decided it was time to leave the insurgency and joined the government's peace and reintegration programme, and not long after the ALP. There was no formal approval obtained from a local shura or any vetting done by government institutions, as required by the ALP guidelines. Rasoul Mohsini, head of provincial council, tried to block such type of ALP recruitments by pointing to irregularities in the ALP procedure. The two ALP members hoped that the military pressure would soon ease off so they could rejoin the Taliban and resume their jihad against foreign forces.[181]

Following the precedent in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, the ALP was expanded to Dand-e-Ghori, west of the Baghlan-Mazar highway. A member of the Baghlan ASOP[182] shura, who was involved in the initial discussions stressed that the ALP was established in Dand-e-Ghori about a year after the battle in Shahabuddin. From the beginning US Special Forces exerted a strong influence on the implementation of the programme. They preferred to work with local commanders, and in so doing reinforced their authority and position in the local political economy. The relationship with US forces paved the way for local strongmen to dominate the ALP programme and manipulate it for their own agendas. The local shura, which was in theory responsible for vetting ALP recruits was reportedly established one year *after* the ALP had been established in Dand-e-Ghori.[183] Instead, Mullah Alam's self-appointed local council, *shura-e-sulh-wa-musharikat-e-mili*, rubber-stamped most of the decisions regarding recruitment of fighters and the

[181] Interview # 65.
[182] ASOP was piloted in 2008 in Wardak (chapter 6). It was subsequently expanded to other insecure provinces. ASOP's main objective was to improve stability by recruiting and paying sympathetic local elders to un-elected district councils. The programme was discontinued in 2011 when USAID stopped funding the initiative.
[183] Interview # 56.

appointment of unit commanders.[184] As happened in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, existing arbaki fighters and former insurgents were handed government-issued uniforms and ALP badges, altogether obviating the need for recruitment through local shuras. The recruitment papers of some of the ALP members were approved by the above-mentioned shura, while others were processed by a special committee in the provincial council where Rasoul Mohsini, a staunch opponent of ALP attempted to hinder the process. Once the process had been completed in Pul-e-Khumri, the ALP was subsequently implemented in two other districts - Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dahana-e-Ghori both have large Pashtun populations.[185] In Baghlan-e-Jadid, the majority of ALP recruits belonged to former Hizb commander and district governor, Amir Gul. Because of his official power, Amir Gul succeeded in folding most of his existing militias and those belonging to his commander-networks into the ALP.[186] The information obtained from US Special Forces indicated that, as of May 2012, there were 325 ALP members in Pul-e-Khumri and 300 recruits had been allocated to each of the other two districts - Dahana-e-Ghori and Baghlan-e-Jadid.[187] Commander Nurul Haq provided slightly different numbers regarding the strength of the ALP in Pul-e-Khumri (425) and Dahan-e-Ghori (300). The 725 ALP members were divided into thirty-three units, each unit having their own sub-commander.[188] The 900 or so ALP were now part of a much larger provincial security architecture, comprised of 2,500 ANP and 1,200 ANA personnel, as well as thousands of illegal armed groups.

As illustrated, the ALP recruitment seldom happened according to the guidelines issued by the ministry of interior. Provincial officials and powerbrokers often complained about the dominant role of US forces and the constraints on their power. Rasoul Mohsini, for example, deeply resented the behaviour of US Special Forces and their bias toward the ALP. He argued that American support had empowered 'criminals' like Nurul Haq, who

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[184] Mullah Alam, a former Hizb commander was considered the main influence behind the ALP in Baghlan.
[185] The Tajik-dominated districts of Andarab, Nahrin and Khinjan, where allegedly thousands of illegal armed groups operated had not been allotted ALP units.
[186] Interview # 14, 31.03.2012.
[187] Interview # 59.
[188] Interview # 58.

routinely flouted the authority of the provincial governor and chief of police.[189] The Andarabi powerbrokers, who dominated the provincial security structure essentially viewed the ALP as a 'Pashtun militia'. Mohsini's opponents countered that his criticism of the ALP was for no other reason except that 'it represented a Pashtun threat to the Tajik hegemony over which he presided' (Mogelson 2011). US Special Forces shared the view of Pashtuns who argued that the dominance of the security sector by Jamiat-linked Andarabi factions was illegitimate. However, by siding with Pashtuns and isolating the process from political interference by Jamiat powerbrokers, the US military made the ALP in Baghlan more controversial.[190] As previously mentioned, efforts to reform the ANP remained stymied. The ALP also acted fairly autonomously and circumvented attempts by the police chief to actively regulate them. Therefore, relations between the 'national' and 'local' police remained tense. I address this point in the next section, wherein I expand upon the brief account, provided in the introduction, of an armed clash between the ANP and the ALP in central Pul-e-Khumri. Incidents like this one not only reflected but also accentuated the existing lines of conflict. When Nurul Haq was asked, after the fight had been concluded and the culprits were still at large, whether he would be willing to demobilise when the ALP programme ended,[191] he responded that he was willing to hand over his weapons to the Afghan government, but 'not to the government in Pul-i-Khumri'. He added, however, that 'as long as the government in Pul-i-Khumri remains the way it is now - an Andarabi organization - we are going to protect ourselves however we can' (Mogelson 2011).

A paradoxical outcome of the US military's support to ALP has been the reinforcement of two separate governing orders: one urban and 'national', and the other rural and 'local'. After recognising this dynamic, the US military began working on bridging the divide between the two sets of power holders in Pul-e-Khumri and Dand-e-Shahabuddin

[189] Interview # 11.
[190] Interview # 40.
[191] When the ALP was first approved in August 2010 by the Afghan government it was stipulated that the programme would run from 2-5 years. In early 2012, Commander of ISAF Gen. John Allen indicated that ISAF was considering making ALP permanent. In February 2013, the Pentagon revealed plans to expand the programme from 30,000 to 45,000 and extend its mandate for another five years.

and Dand-e-Ghori.[192] Alam Jan, member of the provincial council, remained sceptical about the success of these efforts. He disagreed that the US military's presence had contributed to improvements in security and governance in Baghlan. The only positive outcome he could point to was the US Special Forces' ability to prevent the ALP members from turning to 'chur-au-chapawul' (open banditry), and to some extent managing armed tensions mainly by interposing themselves between the two forces. This raises the question of what will happen when US forces eventually withdraw from Baghlan. Governor Munshi Majid constantly worried about the implications of US withdrawal and the potential for greater insecurity. He held a poor view of Nurul Haq and most other ALP commanders and criticised the US Special Forces for empowering them. Since the governor considered most ALP member as thugs and criminals, he remained convinced that as soon as the Americans left, the two sides would be at each other's throats.[193]

The ALP no doubt played a role in maintaining security, since travel to former insurgent strongholds in the three districts where the programme has been implemented had become possible. However, it was difficult for UNAMA to verify reports of positive security gains since its personnel were not allowed to travel to most areas outside Pul-e-Khumri city, which were considered too insecure.[194] Security is essentially about subjective criteria, and given that the ALP in Baghlan was mostly made of ex-Hizb and some Taliban fighters the relative security in mid-2012 might turn out to be a temporary pause in the internal power struggles, likely to resume with the next shift in political dynamics. Some maintained that in terms of security or conflict dynamics little had changed, only the labels had - mujahedin militias had become government forces, insurgents had become counterinsurgents and arbaki had transitioned to ALP. Besides insurgents and abusive ALP militias, Baghlan's security problems also stemmed from the reported presence of thousands of illegal armed groups, particularly in Andarab and Nahrin districts. The ALP by comparison was less than a thousand-man lightly armed force scattered over three districts. It was, therefore, understandable why local villagers

[192] Interview # 59.
[193] Interview # 12.
[194] Interview # 8.

seemed baffled about the outsiders' concerns regarding the ALP, while the much bigger problem of illegal armed groups had remained unaddressed.[195] In light of that, the intra- and intergroup struggles were expected to intensify ahead of NATO withdrawal and elections in 2014. The Taliban also intensified their military campaign against government forces, killing around fifteen army and policemen each day during the 2014 summer fighting season (Najafizada 2014).

VI. Thou shalt not kill thy brother

I first visited Baghlan in mid-October 2011 to commence my fieldwork. The small city of Pul-e-Khumri was palpably affected by political tensions. Less than six weeks previously, a major armed clash had occurred between members of the ALP, dominated by Pashtuns and the regular police, the ANP dominated by Tajiks. This violent episode had taken place in a busy market in Bolakha-e-cement, a former workers' colony not far from the town centre. It was August 29, the last day of Ramadan when people in urban areas do most of their shopping for the next day's Eid. Although a month had passed, the incident was still the focus of a lot of discussions in town, invariably adding more complexity to the case. The competing narratives made it hard to differentiate fact from fiction. Just days before my arrival, Pashtun villagers from the surrounding areas of Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori had organised demonstrations and blocked the roads to pressure the government to arrest the main culprit, an ANP commander from Andarab by the name of Col. Ghani Shah Mahmood. He was accused of killing an ALP member that day, allegedly in front of many witnesses and later resisted arrest. A bloody battle ensued in which the ANP unit under his command fought against ALP militias and their US Special Forces mentors. After the clash, Ghani and his men went into hiding, apparently protected by his fellow Andarabi commanders and politicians. I went to see Mullah Alam, a former Hizb-e-Islami commander and the main political influence behind the ALP in Baghlan, to hear his side of the story. His reputation was closely tied with controversy and danger. He feared his Andarabi rivals who accused him of being a

[195] Interview # 57.

Taliban proxy, while the Taliban considered him a *kafir* (non-believer) for supporting the ALP and Karzai's re-election campaign in 2009.[196] Before our meeting, I had gathered an account of the incident from local journalists. The clash of arms between the two forces provided an intriguing angle on the emergence and evolution of ALP, but also the broader political and security context, of which the ALP was a small but important part.

Mullah Alam's headquarters-cum-home was in Bagh-e-Shamal in Dand-e-Ghori, located southwest of the Baghlan–Mazar highway. To travel there one had to cross an invisible border, as the town of Pul-e-Khumri and Dand-e-Ghori were ruled by two different sets of power holders. Each area had its own set of rules and protection regimes. His base was guarded by heavily armed ALP militias. The incident in Bolakha-e-cement held crucial significance for Mullah Alam. It brought him on a new collision course with one-time allies from Andarab (see section II). The most powerful of all the Andarabi commanders was Rasoul Mohsini, head of the provincial council. There was a widely held view that he was 'responsible for the Tajik power grab in Baghlan after 2001, and the marginalisation of the Pashtuns that followed'. He was 'accused of seizing Pashtun lands, running drugs and brutally dispensing with his enemies' (Mogelson 2011).[197] Rasoul Mohsini and Mullah Alam played important roles in the aftermath of the 29 August incident. That day, late in the afternoon, two young boys had gone to the local bazaar to get their hair done for the next day's Eid celebrations. One of the boys, fifteen-year old Humayun was a relative and belonged to the ALP outfit of commander Mohammad Gul and his brother Sher Mohammad from the nearby Dand-e-Ghori area. When Humayun and his friend came out of the barber's shop they were stopped by members of a Quick Reaction Force unit of ANP, which controlled a checkpoint on the nearby Baghlan-Kunduz highway. They were asked to spend the night in the ANP base. The commander of this particular police unit was Col. Ghani, a well-connected Andarabi police officer. Like the rest of the provincial police force, his police unit was dominated by armed groups from Andarab district. It was unclear whether the two boys willingly agreed to enter the base or were in fact coerced by Ghani's men. Not long after, Sher Mohammad

[196] Mullah Alam had served as Karzai's election campaign manager in 2009.

[197] Rasoul Mohsini had powerful allies, including vice president Fahim Qasim and 'many connections, all the way to the president himself' (Mogelson 2011).

was informed that Ghani's men had taken Humayun and were using him for sex, a prevalent practice in the police force. Sher phoned Ghani and demanded that he immediately release Humayun and his friend. A heated argument erupted between the two commanders. Feeling insulted by Sher's aggressive tone, Ghani reportedly hurled abuse at him and threatened him over the phone. Enraged by Ghani's behaviour, Sher drove over to his ANP base and tried to get inside to make his demands to Ghani in person and secure the boys' release. He was apparently unarmed when he approached the main checkpoint. The guards refused to let him into the base. To force his point, he went back to his car and picked up his AK-47 rifle and returned to the checkpoint. When he repeated his demand, Ghani ordered his guards to shoot him. The guards shot him in the leg and then beat him with their fists and the butts of their rifles. This much is clear. What is not so clear is what happened after the shooting.

According to one version of the event, after he was shot, Sher dragged himself to a nearby pharmacy to seek medical assistance. Ghani and his men followed him to the pharmacy, where Ghani shot him in the back and killed him. They then returned to their base.[198] An Afghan army officer who claimed to have witnessed the shooting recounted a different version of the event to a New York Times journalist. The army officer told the journalist that he happened to be driving by the bazaar when the shooting occurred. He stopped his car and went to the scene of the incident where he saw one of Ghani's police officers beating Sher with the butt of his rifle. The army officer intervened and managed to disarm Sher's assailant. The policemen fled and entered the ANP base. He then tried to get Sher into his vehicle to take him to hospital in Pul-e-Khumri. While attempting this, Ghani himself approached the car and shot Sher multiple times in the back – even though the army officer tried to stop him. Afterwards, Ghani entered the same base where the first assailant had fled. Meanwhile, an ambulance arrived and took Sher to the hospital for treatment. He was still alive when the ambulance left (Mogelson 2011).

Shortly after the shooting, more armed men arrived at the scene. They included the national police (ANP), Afghan and American Special Forces and a large contingent of the local police (ALP). Sher Mohammad's brother, ALP commander Mohammad Gul and

[198] Interview # 14, 28.11.2011.

his men were ready to pounce on Ghani's men and exact revenge. Ghani's QRF unit was, in theory at least, responsible for backing ALP units in the event they came under insurgent attacks. Instead they were now facing each other in an armed stand off. The Afghan and US Special Forces' attempts to separate the 'national' and 'local' police soon turned into a much larger armed clash. When the ambulance carrying Sher's dead body returned to the scene, emotions flared up and the situation started to get out of control. US Special Forces apparently convinced the ALP members to attend to Sher and take his body for burial, while they attempted to arrest Ghani and his men. A team of US Special Forces following behind Afghan Special Forces approached the base and asked Ghani to surrender the men who had killed Sher. The Americans promised to hand over the suspects to the prosecutor's office for investigation. In response Ghani ordered his men to fire on the troops. Suddenly, the air was fractured by the sounds of AK-47 rifles, automatic machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. Under the barrage of fire, the ALP units also joined the fight. The crowd of people quickly run out of the bazaar in anticipation of a drawn out fight.

After a fifteen minutes fire fight, during which time US Special Forces received direct fire from Ghani's men, they requested air support. Soon a NATO fighter jet and an Apache helicopter joined the battle from the skies above. US forces wanted to bomb Ghani's base to end the firing they were receiving. Word of the request for air support must have got out. Shortly after the request had been made, and while the aircraft were circling in the air, US forces on the ground received a phone call from Gen. Abdul Wahid Baba Jan, commander of ANP in northern Afghanistan and a senior Jamiat powerbroker with close ties to the Andarabi commanders. He begged the Americans 'please don't kill everybody out there' and 'that's what stopped us from doing anymore', a member of the US Special Forces who took part in the fighting later told the New York Times journalist (Mogelson 2011). Gen. Baba Jan's last minute action narrowly avoided the massacre of the police at the hands of US Special Forces and their ALP subordinates. The police chief at the time, Gen. Rahimi, claimed that he convinced the US Special Forces to call off the air strike in return for a promise to arrest Ghani and his men.[199] It was a promise he

[199] Interview # 15.

would be unable to keep, ultimately costing him his job. At best of times, the police chief exercised nominal control over his ANP units since most of them were under the influence of Rasoul Mohsini and other Andarabi commanders.

Crime and Punishment

As negotiations went on to call off the air strike on the ANP base, Rasoul Mohsini attempted a daring rescue plan to free Ghani and his cohorts. He reportedly accessed the base via a back road and helped Ghani and two of his men who had been injured in the fighting to escape to safety. They were taken to the main hospital in Pul-e-Khumri for medical treatment. The hospital was located in the heart of the city's administrative district, close to the Governor's office and the national police headquarters. All roads leading to the hospital had been cordoned off by Andarabi militias and ANP forces loyal to Rasoul Khan. The police chief, Gen. Rahimi had effectively lost all control over his police force. As one eyewitness put it 'the whole city had been surrounded by Andarabis… they controlled the police'.[200] The show of force was designed to deter US Special Forces and angry ALP members from attempting to arrest the fugitives. As previously mentioned, the police chief had pledged to apprehend Ghani and his men. When they escaped to the hospital, he pursued them there. However, he met with resistance from his own police force when he tried to arrest them. The Andarabi militias guarding the hospital were in turn surrounded by ANA, ALP and US Special Forces. In the end no one attempted to break the security cordon thrown around the hospital, as it would have set off another round of fighting in the middle of the city's residential neighbourhood, with potentially deadly consequences for civilians.

While an armed clash was avoided, the ALP members insisted on Ghani's arrest to face justice. Again, the police chief tried to mediate the standoff by promising to bring the perpetrators to justice. He persuaded the ALP militias to return to their bases. But he remained powerless. As the perpetrators remained at large, rumours circulated that Rasoul Mohsini was protecting Ghani. Weeks passed before he let it be known that Ghani

[200] Interview # 10.

had been taken to India for treatment. But the ALP and US Special Forces maintained that he was in Baghlan and was being protected by Rasoul Mohsini. The police chief came under increasing pressure from Pashtun powerbrokers who persisted with their demands to bring Ghani to justice. Any accommodations he made towards the Pashtuns resulted in additional pressure from the Andarabis and their supporters, who stalled his efforts. His ambiguous attempts to bring the perpetrators to justice brought him into direct conflict with Rasoul Mohsini and his political allies.[201] While powerful politicians continued to protect the perpetrators, the police chief was fighting for his own survival. In less than a month after the incident in Bolakha-e-cement, Gen. Rahimi was fired from his position and recalled back to Kabul. The ministry of interior sent a soft-spoken Pashtun officer from Helmand to replace him. The new police chief, Assadullah Shirzad, was deemed as someone who would perhaps be more willing to accede to the demands of Andarabi powerbrokers.

Justice denied

After the manner in which Ghani and his men avoided arrest, the speed with which the police chief was removed from his post, the constraints imposed on Pashtun powerbrokers and ALP commanders not to resort to armed action against the Andarabis, and the recognition that the government was not taking their demands seriously, the Pashtuns in Pul-e-Khumri resorted to a more dramatic demonstration of their demands for justice. The demonstrations in early October (2011) were meant to bring national attention to abuse of power by the Andarabis in the government and their attempts to deny justice. News reports showing young men burning tires and blocking roads and shouting anti-government slogans got the attention of politicians in Kabul, especially that of its Pashtun president, Hamid Karzai and Panjshiri-Tajik vice president, Fahim Qasim, the main source behind Andarabi power in Baghlan. The angry demonstrations were

[201] They included Gen. Baba Jan, the head of ANP in the northern region, Balkh Governor, Atta Mohammad Noor, Minister of Interior, Bemillah Mohammadi and the Panjshri Vice President, Fahim Qasim.

designed to create political pressure for action when other options had been exhausted. In that sense they had some success, but in a different way.

In the days following the incident Mullah Alam and other Pashtun powerbrokers mobilised their constituencies and held political jirgas[202] to display unity and strength and issue collective statements calling on the new police chief, Assadullah Shirzad, Governor Munshi Majid and UNAMA to bring Ghani to justice. They also called on the hidden powers behind the scene, a reference to Jamiat strongmen in Kabul and the region to stop protecting criminals and allow the police to do its job, a position, which the US Special Forces also supported. Mullah Alam and his allies gave the authorities one week to arrest Ghani. They threatened to organise mass demonstrations and block the Baghlan-Mazar and Baghlan-Kunduz highways if their demands had not been met by that deadline.[203] The chain of events following the killing of the ALP member in Bolakha-e-cement had mobilised a divided community into action and united the different factions not just in Pul-e-Khumri but also in other districts. As a local observer noted, former jihadi commanders and Pashtun politicians in Baghlan had 'always competed against one another, but the Sher-Ghani incident united all of them'.[204] Pashtun powerbrokers presented the conflict in terms that suggested the need to protect Pashtuns against the Tajik Andarabis, partly by invoking earlier memories of violence and abuse to which some Pashtuns had been subjected by the Andarabi-dominated government forces. In a sense, the ALP had become the instrument of Pashtun political aspirations and patronage politics, while the Andarabis perceived it as a threat to the Tajik hegemony over which they presided.

While the Pashtuns were holding their jirgas in the outskirts of Pul-e-Khumri and making demands for Ghani's arrest, the Andarabi powerbrokers in the city held their own shuras as a sign of support for Ghani and to rally supporters. In September 2011, Mustafa and Rasoul Mohsini hosted a 500-strong Andarabi shura in Pul-e-Khumri to discuss how to stop Pashtun politicians and ALP commanders from escalating the conflict and

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[202] For jirga as a founding Pashtun tradition, see Noelle-Karimi (2006), Barfield (2010), Buchholz (2013). For critique of jirga and its invention as a colonial practice, see Hanifi (2004).
[203] Interview # 14, 28.11.2011.
[204] Interview # 16.

threatening Andarabi power.[205] Although public postures of rivalry and confrontation were maintained, dialogue between the two sides continued to try and reach a settlement. While belligerent commanders like Nurul Haq were in favour of military action against Andarabi power holders and tried to rally Pashtun elders to support them, seasoned politicians like Mullah Alam and Alam Jan called for patience and tried to mediate a political solution to the conflict. They calculated that armed conflict with the Andarabis, apart from straining relations with Kabul and its international backers, would have strengthened Nurul Haq and undermined their position in the local power set up. Like the Andarabis, Pashtuns were equally divided by factionalism. Different factions exploited the anger of local Pashtuns to strengthen their position within the group. As the deadline for Ghani's arrest passed, the protests got underway. Angry demonstrators blocked the roads to Mazar and Kunduz and repeated their demands. National news headlines showed the impact they had generated. The case then took an unexpected turn. Jamiat powerbrokers in Kabul had become alarmed at the prospects of more demonstrations and further armed clashes between ALP and the Andarabi-dominated government forces. They intervened and pressured the sides to reach a settlement. Further escalation of conflict threatened the national level political settlement between President Karzai and his Vice President Fahim Qasim, and their patrimonial networks. It became imperative to find a quick solution to this incident and ensure the stability of the Karzai-Fahim political alliance on which the broader stability of the post-2001 political order essentially rested. I now turn to the outcome of these negotiations.

Tribalising justice

According to a local journalist who followed the story, in early October Ghani had been seen in Pul-e-Khumri in his ANP vehicle along with his bodyguards entering the Komandani, headquarters of the national police. His police sources had informed him that Ghani had twice met with the new police chief, Assadullah Shirzad. Ghani was apparently seeking an out of court settlement with commander Mohammad Gul, Sher's

[205] Interview # 50.

brother. In return he wanted all criminal charges dropped and asked to be reinstated in his old job.[206] The whole incident had taken a bizarre turn. While the Pashtuns were demanding his arrest, Ghani was free to visit the police chief and try to work out a deal. The intended message was that Ghani, and by extension the Andarabis were untouchable. It was meant to convince the Pashtuns to tone down their demands and settle for less, thereby reinforcing the hegemony of the Andarabi commanders and politicians. Negotiations then got underway to work out a settlement with Mohammad Gul and his Pashtun allies. In early November, Gen. Baba Jan, the commander of ANP in northern Afghanistan had summoned Pashtun elders and powerbrokers to Mazar-i-Sharif, where his headquarters was located. He told them to 'stop making more trouble' and demanded an end to public demonstrations and roadblocks as these actions, he argued, 'created insecurity'.[207] He insisted on a speedy resolution of the dispute. He told the elders to convene a tribal jirga to mediate the dispute and award compensation to the victim's family. The offer of blood money to Sher's family may have been designed to undermine unity within the Pashtun ranks, as the offer of money divided those who insisted on Ghani's arrest and prosecution and those who wanted to take the money and close the case. In a clear sign of dictating the terms of the agreement ahead of any substantive discussion in a forum like jirga, where disputants negotiate the terms of a potential settlement, Gen. Baba Jan advised the elders to accept the blood money and drop their demands for Ghani's arrest. He made it clear that this was the best outcome they could hope for under the circumstances. In so doing, the agent of modernity imposed tribal justice on the denizens of *yaghistan* – an illustration of the fact that the basis of modern law is mostly raw power and violence (J. L. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). In a sense, there was no irony in the actions of the regional commander of ANP to subvert the course of justice in order to protect the powerful. In post-2001 Afghanistan such actions were a routine part of the business of government.

Once the outcome had been decided, elders from both communities met and arranged to mediate the dispute along the lines dictated by Gen. Baba Jan. In a paradoxical nod to the

[206] Interview # 10.
[207] Interview # 14, 31.03.2012.

Pashtun code of honour, *Pashtunwali*, which purportedly 'set the social and legal norms of behaviour among the Pashtun tribes' (Ghani 1978, 268), a tribal jirga was convened to settle a murder case between a Tajik ANP commander and a Pashai[208] (not a Pashtun) ALP commander. As Ghani noted, the 'precepts of the code emphasized mediation and adjustment of the claims rather than adjudication and meting out of the punishments' (ibid 1978). That was precisely the main objective of the Andarabi powerbrokers: to avoid a judicial process and ensure that one of their own was not prosecuted and made to pay for his crimes. Finally, in June 2012 local journalists reported that commander Mohammad Gul had reached an out-of-court settlement with Ghani in exchange for blood money amounting to three-and-a-half million Afghanis (equivalent to $70,000). And with that, months of intense political tensions between the Pashtuns and the Andarabi power holders in Pul-e-Khumri dissipated – but the underlying tensions continued to simmer beneath the surface. This was a poignant example of how the powerful reinvent tradition and 'tribalise' justice to suit their hegemonic interests. In the following chapter, I describe a similar attempt by the police chief in Kunduz who sought to settle a controversial rape case through a tribal jirga against the wishes of the victim's family. It involved a well-connected ALP commander accused of sanctioning the abduction and forced marriage of a nomad girl whose case had made national and international headlines.

VII. Conclusions

The armed clash between members of the ALP and the ANP in Pul-e-Khumri, discussed above, exposed the fragility of the post-2001 political order. It cruelly shattered the myth of a cohesive security sector, exposing the divisions and chaotic internal relationships in which key elements of the security forces worked at cross-purposes and most important, it reinforced the logic of separate security regimes, multiple governing orders and partial sovereignties. In the context of a polarised political landscape, growing insurgency and

[208] The Pashai are non-Pashtun hills people mostly living in eastern Afghanistan.

the ascendancy of militia commanders, the ALP experiment resulted in an unstable political outcome, ultimately maintained by constant external interventions– as illustrated by the frequent rotation of senior officials. Although it is tempting to adopt essentialist ideas of ethnicity and tribalism, the conflict in Baghlan defies easy characterisation of a supposed ethnic struggle between two groups or as an example of ancient hatreds (Kaplan 1994). In reality, the conflict was about broader competition over political power and economic resources among rival armed groups who rose to power during the war years. The Pashtun's historical position in the north as a migrant minority coupled with the ascendancy of non-Pashtun militia commanders reveal a more integrated picture of centre-periphery relations. Pashtuns have increasingly drawn Kabul deeper into local conflicts and politics. Arbab Faramuz, a Pashtun elder succinctly expressed the anxieties of Pashtuns in the north, whom he said were in need of protection by the central government because the non-Pashtun provincial authorities were hostile towards local Pashtuns.[209] This further implicated President Karzai and his allies in deciding the course of local politics in Baghlan. In that sense, the Pashtun populations of the north made no attempt to circumvent state encompassment (Scott 1990; Scott 1998). On the contrary, they sought to entangle the central government deeper into local conflicts. In other words, they wanted more state, not less and viewed it as a source of protection, not an undue interference in their supposedly age-old tribal traditions of autonomy.

The chapter demonstrated that the shaky political settlement that had emerged in 2001 after the overthrow of the Taliban in Baghlan (with the help of Americans) was in turn closely tied to regional and national level political settlements. It resulted in the empowerment of a previously insignificant power block, the Jamiat-linked Andarabi commanders who wasted little time in consolidating the Tajik power grab and marginalising the Pashtuns. The emergence of the Taliban insurgency in the north and the arrival of US force in Baghlan provided an opportunity for politically marginalised Pashtun politicians and local commanders to acquire new set of (trans)national relationships and resources and regain some influence to renegotiate (or attempt to) the Tajik-Jamiat dominated post-2001 political order and their place in it. The ALP,

[209] Interview # 64.

therefore, became a vehicle for marginalised Pashtun powerbrokers to renegotiate the dominance of the Jamiat-linked Andarabi elite. The protests, negotiations and ultimately the bargaining outcome that emerged following the removal of the police chief, which was obtained by subverting the jurisdiction of the formal courts by re-categorising a crime to the status of a civil dispute between two aggrieved parties over which ideally customary justice exercised jurisdiction, reinforced the underlying interests of the ruling elite and the structure of hegemonic power relations. It allowed the patronage-based relationships between peripheral and central elites to hold and crucially, ensured the stability of the Karzai-Fahim political alliance. Therefore, the focus on the 'sentimental' aspect of the case - the offer of blood money to victim's family to settle the claim and avoid punishment – arguably operated at the expense of the 'political' and juridical norms. It further entrenched the logic of the prevailing order by protecting the powerful despite clear evidence of abusive behaviour.

This brings me to the consideration of the political developments in Baghlan in light of the recent shift in political dynamics at the national level. Elections in the past, notably the 2009 presidential election led to bitter contests for power and tended to destabilise elite bargains by shortening the cycles of political alliances. By intensifying political competition they also reinforced identity politics and local power bases (Giustozzi and Orsini 2009; Humayoon 2010; Sharan 2013a). The presidential election in 2014 was no exception. The contested nature of the election, the near collapse of the political order into a renewed 'civil war' and the less-than-ideal political compromise, obtained under intense US pressure, in the form of a unity government so that both contenders, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah could share power reflect the growing political instability in the country. As the chapter demonstrated, contests over power at the periphery were brought under control through the intervention of national elite whose broader interests created the 'conditions of possibility' for local rivals to settle their disputes and allow the status quo ante to continue. The inauguration of the (dis)unity government meant that the old political alliances, notably the Karzai-Fahim alliance and the patron-client networks that previously mediated the distribution of power and resources between the contending elite groups- and underpinned the stability of the post-2001 political order – had changed.

The important question to consider now is this: to what extent will bargaining arrangements between newly empowered national elites and existing power centres in the provinces lead to the emergence of stable patronage-based interdependencies and patron-client relationships? The example of Governor Atta provides some tentative answers. He aggressively campaigned for Abdullah, who came second in the electoral race. When negotiations over the outcome of elections turned bitter, he went as far as to declare a 'parallel government' in northern Afghanistan unless Abdullah was declared the president. He emerged as a highly divisive figure. Under the unity government deal, Abdullah was appointed chief executive (equivalent to a prime minister) of the new government, and in theory has the power to retain Atta, his most important ally. At the same time, retaining his governorship under President Ghani will clash with the president's commitment to get rid of any 'parallel government', a reference to Atta's repeated defiance of the central government. If Atta lost power in Balkh, and with Fahim Qasim (died March 2014) and Rasoul Mohsini (killed May 2013) already out of the picture, the Andarabi power holders would lose important 'access-brokers' to the central government. It is possible that the Andarabi powerholders' local rivals, kept out of power for so long, might be tempted to regain power in Baghlan. Sayed Mansoor Naderi, a former governor, might attempt to seize power through his ally Abdul Rashid Dostum, the new vice president. It is possible that Pashtun powerbrokers will attempt to form alliances with President Ghani's inner circle in Kabul to achieve their own political aspirations. All this jockeying for power at the time when the Taliban insurgency is gaining ground everywhere gives some indication of where things could be headed. It could open up new opportunities for the Taliban to negotiate a local settlement based on their own terms, possibly with former Hizb-e-Islami commanders, as they had done in the past, and expand the insurgency. The political landscape of Baghlan, therefore, remains tied to the broader shifting political dynamics in the centre.

The examination of the processes in the next chapter reveals a different dynamic of government support to local armed groups. In contrast to Baghlan where the Pashtun-dominated ALP attempted to balance Jamiat's dominance of the provincial power structures, the arbaki and ALP in Kunduz were mainly dominated by a Jamiat-led coalition of local commanders and it represented the attempts of the ruling elite to

preserve their power in the post-2001 political order which by the end of the decade had come under military threat from the Taliban-led insurgency. The final outcome was less than ideal - prompting the central government, which had previously relied on local strongmen to push back the Taliban to go on the offensive in an attempt to reign in unruly militias in Kunduz.

Chapter 8: Warlord anarchy or local policing: The entanglement of arms and politics in Kunduz

> *When the Taliban reached the gates of Kunduz city, the governor and NDS chief asked the local mujahedin commanders to assemble their men and fight the Taliban. We agreed. We sold our lands to buy weapons and fought the Taliban. We drove them out of Kunduz. We defended ourselves and our government. Today the government has decided to disarm us. We are ready to surrender our weapons. But I warn you if we are disarmed the Taliban will re-emerge and re-take Kunduz*.[210]

I. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the antecedents and emergence of local militias and their contested legacy in Kunduz province. In 2009, the Jamiat-led coalition dominating the provincial administration began an impromptu initiative, without central government approval to arm anti-Taliban militia commanders to contain the insurgency. In the summer of that year, the Taliban influence had reached the city limits, sufficiently strong to pose a military threat to the provincial capital. The self-styled arbaki militias succeeded, albeit momentarily, in containing the Taliban threat. Turf battles among the different armed groups and the abuse of civilians following this partial victory led to a growing perception that the militias were thugs and criminals and a threat to government authority. Such anxieties led to uneven efforts to disarm arbaki commanders in Khanabad, the most heavily militia-dominated district in Kunduz. Considering the legacy of local militias in Afghanistan's recent past it was not an unexpected outcome, and reflected the peoples' bitter experience of living under the repressive rule of militia commanders.

President Karzai maintained that militias outside central government control had been responsible for political instability after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. The

[210] Mohammad Omar, arbaki commander loyal to Abdul rab-Rasoul Sayyaf of Itihad-e-Islami (subsequently named Dawat party). He was addressing a government delegation visiting Khanabad district in September 2011 to enforce a Presidential decree that aimed to disarm abusive local commanders.

decentralisation of coercion at that time led to renewed concerns that if US-and-NATO-backed militias were left unregulated, Afghanistan again faced such a prospect after the withdrawal of NATO forces.[211] It was this fear that led the Karzai government in 2010 to oppose a US military plan to arm local militias outside the government's institutional framework. Karzai stated in an interview that 'the US proposal to establish local militias was a recipe for disaster… Militias were forces outside the structure of the state… that brings anarchy and lawlessness'.[212] The said proposal, Afghan officials argued, was influenced by the US military's experience of arming Sunni militias in Iraq after the 2003 invasion. They worried that Iraq-style 'tribal' militias directly armed by US forces (or local powerbrokers) outside central government control would result in lawlessness and exacerbate the conflict. The basic assumption was that militias recruited by local elders and operating under government control were helpful in fighting the insurgency – those outside it were unreliable and responsible for insecurity. In reality the supposed boundary separating the insider and outsider or state and non-state armed groups resembled a thin line in the sand, constantly shifting according to changes in political dynamics. In many instances government-backed militias ended up preying on the local population and earning notoriety as warlord militias.

As previously noted, concerns over the destabilising potential of direct US military support to local commanders led to government attempts to 'nationalise militias' by incorporating existing militias into ALP and disbanding private security companies. The ALP represented government regulation to centralise the means of coercion and the flow of patronage and subordinate local commanders to central authority (chapter 5). As this chapter shows, despite the ALP agreement NATO forces continued to support local militias like the CIP in parts of Kunduz, which were by the end of 2011 disbanded following a Presidential decree citing increased insecurity and predatory behaviour. The disbanding of CIP reinforced the notion that Karzai, who sought to build up his powerbase through brokering relationships and patronage networks viewed any attempts by foreign forces to directly empower local commanders outside the centre's clientele

[211] Interview # 103.
[212] Ibid.

networks as a threat to the patrimonial order he and his allies had consolidated since ascending to power in 2001.

The government's claim that militias outside government control contributed to lawlessness and insecurity routinely clashed with the reality of power politics in Kunduz. The processes examined in this chapter help to unsettle the state's sanitising discourse about rogue militias by pointing to close links and relationships of interdependency between state authority and unruly commanders. The portrayal of local militias, many of whom were incorporated into the provincial police force after 2001 as a threat to government authority overshadowed their critical role in local security and fighting the Taliban. Despite previous rounds of disarmament, those militias who could not be accommodated in provincial security forces remained part of the local security architecture and continued to maintain patrimonial connections to local and national powerbrokers. Far from being a threat, militia commanders like Mohammad Omar[213] (quoted above) and Mir Alam[214] served as the bedrock of the central government's power in Kunduz - reflecting the logic of the broader political settlement whereby President Karzai and his allies relied on local strongmen for their power at the periphery. Dependence on local strongmen was most visible during counterinsurgency operations and at the time of elections, both to secure election sites (or disrupt election in the opponent's areas) and to coerce people to vote or stuff ballot boxes (chapter 5).

By retracing the processes through which the arbaki militias emerged and a year later transitioned to the ALP, this chapter highlights important aspects of the local political economy, the distribution of power among contending groups and the evolving security dynamics in Kunduz. The role played by militia commanders in containing the insurgency further entrenched their dominance of the provincial power structures. The re-emergence of militia commanders reinforced a power shift that began with the outbreak of the war in 1978. It signified transfer of authority from the traditional rural notables, who had historically been the gatekeepers between local communities and the provincial

[213] Omar hails from Khanabad district. His militias gained notoriety when they took part in a government-led Taliban clearing operations in September 2013 in Dasht-e-Archi district. The raid aimed at the Taliban quickly turned into a looting rampage whose main target were local villagers (Cecchinel 2014a).
[214] An influential Jamiat-linked commander in Khanabad district with close links to Vice President Fahim Qasim.

administration in favour of a new class of military entrepreneurs and a political economy shaped by military patrimonialism. A powerful illustration of this transformation was demonstrated in Khanabad district when in September 2011 government representatives and local elders attempted, unsuccessfully, to disarm well-known arbaki commanders accused of abusing civilians. By relying on extensive patrimonial ties to powerful powerbrokers and clientelist networks in Kabul, cemented by personal, family, commercial and political networks they succeeded in defying presidential orders and retained their weapons. At the same time, the picture is more complicated than the popular perception of warlords holding power in the provinces in opposition to the central government in Kabul.[215] To some extent, arbaki commanders in Khanabad, and elsewhere in Kunduz constituted a strong link in the rusty chain of centre-periphery relations. In other words, not only had they replaced rural notables in centre-periphery relations, local commanders had also strengthened the previously weak links of sub-national administration to the centre. Unlike in the past, the present rulers in places like Khanabad happened to be local strongmen not the typically 'disinterested' Pashtun ruling elite sent by Kabul to govern (ineffectively) rural Kunduz (Barfield 2013).

After providing some essential historical background regarding the extension of governmental power to Kunduz, the chapter lays out the recent history of power relations and security dynamics in the province, notably the rise to power of militia commanders during the war years. The examination of conflict dynamics and power struggles in the years preceding the establishment of arbaki and ALP militias helps to contextualise the emergence of the insurgency and government-backed militias in Kunduz. By chronicling the arbaki and ALP processes, this chapter shows how militia commanders, who had been partially disarmed during the early years of the intervention, re-emerged to secure the state's legal sanction and patronage and translated their initial success into effective

[215] The notion of powerful commanders and warlords in control of areas outside Kabul firmly opposing central government attempts to extend its authority to the countryside is a familiar trope found in post-2001 literature on Afghanistan. Founded on the basis of opposition between the centre (the loci of government) and the periphery (the loci of warlord power), this notion has reframed the older imagery of the constant tug-of-war between the tribes and the state (R. Tapper 1983). It has deterred scholars from understanding the nuances of the evolving political economy in Afghanistan, in particular the influence of the business-politics nexus and the role of patrimonial relationships in fostering political alliances among otherwise competing elites. For example, see (Cramer and Goodhand 2002; Giustozzi 2003; Giustozzi 2004; Sedra 2006).

military and political domination – and patrimonial ties with powerbrokers in Kabul. I conclude that far from the image of menacing warlords obstructing the extension of state power, in the fragmented political climate of Kunduz militia commanders played a crucial role in entangling the central government in local politics, maintaining control and providing security. As the above quotation showed, militia commanders like Mohammad Omar appear to be most interested in securing official sanction and state patronage for their role in security provision in order to retain their power. This self-representation of commanders as defenders of the country and Karzai's criticism of rogue militias can be understood as the struggle for political legitimacy, attempts to re-negotiate patronage-based relationships and the right to maintain armed groups. The arbaki and ALP processes analysed below help to illustrate these inter-related dynamics.

II. The changing political and security landscape in Kunduz

Located on Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan, Kunduz province has an ethnically mixed population, the result of successive immigration waves,[216] of around 935,000.[217] Pashtuns (34%) are considered the single largest ethnic group in an otherwise non-Pashtun region.[218] Kunduz emerged as an autonomous province following administrative reforms in the 1960s, which resulted in the division of Qataghan or Afghan Turkistan into three separate provinces - present-day Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan. The province is composed of seven districts: Imam Sahib, Qala-e-Zal, Chahardara, Dasht-e-Archi, Aliabad, Khanabad and central Kunduz. It has been an economically important region of Afghanistan, a rare example of successful state-driven agricultural and industrial development interventions dating back to the late 19th

[216] A mix of coercive and voluntary population transfers, southern Pashtuns were settled in the region in the late 19th century in response to Russian imperial encroachment this side of the Oxus river and to boost agriculture and government revenues (N. Tapper 1983). The immigration of Pashtuns to the north continued during the era of industrial developments in the 1930s, possibly until the 1970s.
[217] The population estimate is taken from the government's 2011-12 population survey.
[218] The other major ethnic groups in Kunduz include Uzbek (27%), Tajik (20%) and Turkmen (9.4%), as well as a small percentage of Arab and Hazara (Wörmer 2012). By the end of 19th century, Pashtuns comprised 30 percent of Kunduz' population (Lee 1996).

century.[219] Since 2009, it regained its previous strategic importance given its location on the northern supply route for NATO forces.

The decline of the Chingizid empire during the first-half of 17th century and the Persian occupation a century later enhanced the position of Uzbeks and fostered the rise of independent 'amirid states' (Noelle 1997, 69). The Qataghan region was integrated into the emerging Durrani Empire in the second half of the 18th century. Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-1773) did not impose a new order; he merely recognised the control of local Uzbek rulers. By appointing former rulers as governors of the newly conquered territories he ensured their subordination to his authority. After his death, Ahmad Shah's successors gradually lost control of Afghan Turkistan. The region was subsequently dominated until mid-19th century by 'numerous petty Uzbek emirates, or tiny city states, which were locked into permanent competition for supremacy', a situation which was partly fueled by a broader competition between Kabul and Bukhara over the control of the region (Wilde 2013, 60; Lee 1996). As a result local Uzbek rulers sometimes accepted suzerainty from more than one patron at a time, playing competing powers against one another at the same time as using such alliances to undermine the power of local rivals.[220]

After the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-1842), Dost Mohammad Khan embarked on a campaign of re-conquest of northern Afghanistan. By 1859 most of northern Afghanistan had been submitted to Kabul's rule (Noelle 1997, 88 & 97). Like his predecessors, Dost Mohammad followed the administrative practice of retaining local Uzbek amirs as clients and potentates of the central government in a system of indirect rule. This patrimonial system of rule survived until the region was subjected to the centralising policies of Abdul Rahman Khan (Barfield 2010). His conquest of the region resulted in the large-scale elimination or displacement of the former Uzbek ruling elite and facilitated the

[219] Kunduz had not always been so productive. Most of the land on which the Pashtun settlers were based consisted of marshlands, which had to be drained for agricultural use. The largest such scheme began in the 1920s, when 'Sher Khan Nashir, the governor of Kunduz, began a systematic effort to drain the region's marshlands for cotton production' (Barfield 2013, 134). The 1930s saw the industrialization of agriculture in Kunduz as many irrigation systems and cotton and textile industries were established in central Kunduz, where a new provincial capital sprang up around the Spinzar Cotton factory.

[220] This dynamic also opened the way for external powers to intervene in local politics and provide support to their respective clients.

establishment of central rule in Kunduz. He retained some of the patron-client practices of his predecessors by relying on locally appointed middlemen for administrative tasks such as collecting taxes or recruiting soldiers (Wilde 2013, 61; Noelle 1997, 106). As a result 'the relationship between central and rural areas was mediated by local elites: well-to-do landlords, religious dignitaries and influential families' (Wilde 2013, 59). This form of power which largely rested on bonds of patronage and clientele networks remained in place until the outbreak of conflict in 1979 (Barfield 2013; Centlivres-Demont and Centlivres 2013) and possibly beyond. The repressive policies of PDPA and the mujahedin and mass migrations associated with the conflict brought about sweeping social changes in the country (Gibbs 1986; Roy 1990; B. R. Rubin 1995). A class of military entrepreneurs or mujahedin commanders emerged which had a mixed social background, including mullahs, tribal khans and the educated class (D. B. Edwards 2002; Dorronsoro 2005).[221] They took over the social and political function of the traditional powerbrokers in managing relations with external actors.

During the 1980s, the Soviets maintained a major military base in Kunduz. The Soviet counterinsurgency strategy was based on the control of major urban centers and the outlying areas (Dorronsoro 2005, 175–91). In Kunduz, Soviet forces fought different mujahedin groups for control of territory and strategic communication networks such as the Kunduz-Kabul highway. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces, Kunduz was one of the first provinces to briefly fall to the mujahedin in August 1988, to be recaptured shortly afterwards by government forces. After the fall of Najibullah's government in 1992, the different mujahedin groups assimilated into the existing government structures, resulting in an unstable power sharing arrangement that was frequently put to the test on the battlefield. This outcome did not represent an outright military victory of one side over the other; but resembled a balance or distribution of power between former enemies. The alliances were primarily facilitated by ethnic affiliations: the Pashtun elements of the security forces surrendered the bulk of the military resources to Pashtun-dominated

[221] In practice it was often difficult to distinguish these commander categories from one another, as the case of Aref Khan from Kunduz demonstrates. As the principal commander in Kunduz, he was an educated man, the son of the former mayor of Kunduz and a major landowner. Often educated men who became mujahedin commanders belonged to notable families (Dorronsoro 2005, 112).

resistance groups, notably Itihad and Hizb - this gave the two factions a military edge over their rivals. Likewise, the Tajik elements in the security forces joined up with Jamiat and Junbish factions. As a result, the government's security and administrative structures were largely retained, making it possible for a number of former regime loyalists to serve in key technical and advisory positions to different mujahedin factions.

Owing to the nature of the political settlement, during the first half of the 1990s Kunduz remained divided among different mujahedin parties and pro-government militias. For example, central Kunduz and its cotton growing areas, notably Khanabad district, which were mostly urban and home to a large population of Pashtun settlers, remained under the control of Itihad and Jamiat. But political fragmentation prevented the rise of a 'warlord polity' like that of Ismail Khan in the west (Giustozzi 2009b). Political and military alliances frequently changed, reflecting changes in the military situation and unstable control over territory. Between 1992 and 2001, Kunduz city was sometimes besieged for months and changed hands many times (Wörmer 2012). Factional power struggles for the control of this strategically important province continued until the arrival of the Taliban in 1997. For instance, in late 1993 and early 1994, Dostum's forces and the governing shura of Kunduz, dominated by Jamiat and Itihad, fought repeatedly over control of Sher Khan Bandar and Kunduz city (B. R. Rubin 1995, 276). Since no single group emerged to dominate the whole province, the different mujahedin groups maintained patrimonial links to their respective factions in the central government to access resources and maintain control.

The logic of military-patrimonialism meant that local commanders were also entangled in national level power struggles. After the fall of the Najibullah government in 1992, Kabul was divided among rival armed factions. Jamiat, Junbish, Itihad and Harakat were the main factions that formed a coalition government, the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Hizb did not recognise the mujahedin government. Shortly after the fall of Kabul to the mujahedin, fighting erupted for the control of the city. The Jamiat-Hizb rivalry turned into the main split within the mujahedin parties. In 1994, Hizb and Junbish reconciled and formed a military alliance against the Jamiat-dominated coalition government. At the same time, the politico-military factions that fought for the control of Kabul also maintained alliances with local commanders in Kunduz. That meant changes in the

structure of alliance making in Kabul also resulted in changes to the political settlement in Kunduz, setting off new rounds of fighting among the different armed groups. As a result of this dynamic, Kunduz emerged, beside Kabul, as a major battleground of the internecine war in the early 1990s. The first time heavy fighting erupted in Kunduz was in the summer of 1992, when Junbish forces, then allied with Jamiat, attempted to take over territory from Hizb. However, in 1994, Junbish and Hizb had formed an alliance and jointly fought against Jamiat and Itihad, which controlled most of the urban areas in Kunduz. Sometime alliance making followed a perverse logic: in early 1993, despite their rivalries at the national level, Jamiat and Hizb joined forces against Dostum, at the time a Jamiat ally in Kabul (Wörmer 2012, 14). In 1997, the mujahedin shura of Kunduz headed by Jamiat commander Aref Khan surrendered power to the advancing Taliban troops. Afterwards, Aref Khan became the Taliban governor of Kunduz, while other commanders from Jamiat, notably Mir Alam formed alliances with Junbish and Hizb, what became known as the Northern Alliance, and continued to resist the Taliban in the north. After the Taliban captured Kunduz it emerged as their main military stronghold in northern Afghanistan.

III. The commanders' return to power: Political architecture after 2001

The commander-networks system of military-patrimonialism served as a basis for Northern Alliance factions to join the US military campaign to topple the Taliban in late 2001. As allies of the US military, Jamiat, Itihad and Junbish regained the reins of power in Kunduz after the fall of Taliban. Hizb's power declined after a number of its prominent commanders died in a plane crash in the early days of the new order – only the Hizb-linked Ibrahimi family remained in power in the northern district of Imam Sahib. Despite alliances of convenience among the US-backed coalition, turf wars between Jamiat and Junbish continued until mid-2000s. Jihad-era commanders like Mir Alam played a crucial role in ensuring that Jamiat's dominance at the national level was also reflected in the provincial power structure. As commander of the 54th army division, mostly made up of Jamiat militias, Mir Alam's powerbase lay in central Kunduz and Khanabad. The political bargain struck between Jamiat, Itihad and Junbish involved divvying up power

to local commanders linked to their factions. Abdul Latif Ibrahimi, from the Uzbek Ibrahimi family became the provincial governor (2002-04). His brother, Abdul Rauf became commander of the border police, and in 2005 was elected to Parliament.[222] From 2004 until his death in October 2010, Engineer Mohammad Omar, a prominent Northern Alliance commander and member of Itihad served as provincial governor. Although the last two governors, Engineer Mohmmad Omar (2004-10) and Mohammad Anwar Jegdalek (2011-13) happened to be Pashtun, local Pashtuns were largely excluded from the local political settlement, and the channelling of patronage in the form of resources and government positions reflected a new power balance dominated by Jamiat commanders. Since they suspected most of the local Pashtuns of harbouring sympathy for Taliban insurgents, in those districts where Taliban enjoyed greater support among the population (Chahardara, Aliabad and Dasht-e-Archi), Jamiat powerbrokers retained control of the key security portfolios of district police chief and head of NDS, the intelligence agency.

To consolidate the power grab, Northern Alliance commanders folded their militias into the local security structure. They successfully subverted the UN-supported disarmament programmes and retained their coercive power. For example, by the end of the decade, there remained an estimated 4,500 to 10,000 militias throughout the province, and some 3,000-4,000 militiamen in Khanabad district alone (Hewad 2012). A German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) became the centre for security sector reform and reconstruction efforts in Kunduz, but the few thousand German troops maintained a passive role, which involved working with rather than challenging commander power structures (Wörmer 2012; Münch 2013). In spite of international efforts to build up the regular police force, the ANP maintained a total force of some 1,700 personnel in Kunduz. Most districts employed between 30-50 ANP personnel, this number proved insufficient even during the relatively stable years before the insurgency emerged. The lack of enough manpower and resources exacerbated the problem as insurgents increased attacks against government and NATO forces, beginning in 2008.

[222] Abdul Rauf became the Speaker of Parliament in 2011.

The ubiquitous presence of local militias in Kunduz and their extensive links to official security forces clearly unsettles the official distinction between state and non-state and regular and irregular forces. A number of provincial case studies have shown that the ANP were largely composed of local militias that had been rebranded as 'national' police after 2001 (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014). In Kunduz, the provincial security force after 2001 were mostly made up of anti-Taliban factional militias. Local militias that fought on behalf of the government against the Taliban in 2009 (and in subsequent years) emerged from the same security environment as the government forces- and not from some fictional tribal domain under the authority of elders. As shown below, the arbaki and ALP further contributed to this trend, as the programme was heavily appropriated by the commander-networks dominated by Jamiat. The domination of provincial administration by Jamiat powerbrokers and the presence of such a large number of fighters and ready availability of arms obviously helped in the implementation of the arbaki plan ahead of the August 2009 presidential elections. Relatively strong control at the local level made it desirable for President Karzai to rely upon the power of the Jamiat-led coalition of local commanders. In exchange for state resources and government positions, Karzai obtained the political loyalties of local strongmen. The national-level alliance between Karzai and Fahim reinforced the power sharing arrangement in the province. Far from attempting to marginalise and weaken Jamiat's power in Kunduz, a pragmatic Karzai instead relied on local strongmen for his powerbase in the province, which reflected a broader policy of reliance on northern warlords at the national level.

IV. The insurgency and the emergence of arbaki militias

From the mid-2000s onwards, the Taliban insurgency in the south intensified and over time spread beyond the Pashtun heartlands. By 2009, the Taliban presence in Kunduz had grown, partly because of the increased strategic importance of the province with the rerouting of NATO supplies through northern Afghanistan. The Taliban expanded their presence in the north by exploiting Pashtun feelings of marginalisation and through the manipulation of local conflicts, mostly the rivalry between Hizb and Jamiat. They also used historic links to local religious clerics in non-Pashtun areas to mobilise support

(Moghaddam Azerbaijani 2009; Giustozzi and Reuter 2011). In the spring of 2009, Kunduz experienced a wave of Taliban violence, and insurgents established a presence in Chahardara, from where they expanded their military operations to Aliabad, Imam Sahib, Dasht-e-Archi, and central Kunduz- all these districts have a significant Pashtun presence. Besides Chahardara, the insurgents began exerting military pressure on the provincial capital and frequently carried out attacks against government installations and security forces.[223]

The Taliban resurgence posed a potent threat to the power of the ruling coalition headed by Jamiat. The arbaki militias emerged in response to the insurgency. By the summer of 2009, the provincial authorities had become sufficiently alarmed by the Taliban penetration to request additional police and army personnel, partly because German-led ISAF forces were reluctant to fight the Taliban. When the central government ignored the request for deployment of additional police and army units, Governor Omar asked the Ministry of Interior to expand the AP3 programme to Kunduz. But there was no plan at the time to expand AP3, which piloted in Wardak at the time, to other provinces (chapter 6). As a last resort, Governor Omar and his jihadi allies in the provincial administration began arming local jihadi commanders, based on the tribal policing concept of arbaki.

The mobilisation of arbaki militias emerged as a locally driven initiative and was not pushed by the Ministry of Interior or US forces. In fact, President Karzai and his minister of defence were opposed to the initiative, although the Minister of Interior, Haneef Atmar, who had supported the AP3 initiative in Wardak was more agnostic about militias, being prepared to support them so long as they remained under central government control (chapter 5). At the time the German military command in the north suggested sending 2,500 additional police to Kunduz instead of arming local militias, which they thought risked undermining the formal security structures and reversing the modest progress of the DDR and DIAG programmes. As it happened, the Jamiat-dominated NDS provided some weapons and funds to local commanders to mobilise their followers. The effort to support mujahedin commanders to fight the insurgency initially focused on the districts of Imam Sahib, Khanabad and Qala-e-Zal. The Taliban

[223] Interview # 32. 09.01.2012.

stronghold of Chahardara was considered too insecure to initiate a local arbaki force (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009a). According to the US Embassy in Kabul, in June 2009 'Governor Mohammad Omar announced the creation of an Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) in Kunduz province… In July, Gov. Omar and provincial security officials conducted shuras throughout the province, in which elders and former mujahedeen commanders were asked to identify suitable recruits for the force' (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2010). The plan required local jihadi commanders to mobilise between 150-200 local militias in each district to complement the regular police to combat the insurgency.

Besides the threat of insurgency to their power bases, the promise of legal sanction for private militias which had successfully avoided previous disarmament efforts, and the lure of state patronage and economic support were among the incentives that prompted former jihadi commanders to rearm their followers against the Taliban. Mir Alam who had been marginalised from power took advantage of the fluid situation to reactivate his network of commanders. The NDS was put in charge of recruiting local commanders – it became a 'coordinating office' for local militias, with General Daud, the provincial director relying almost exclusively on Mir Alam (his brother-in-law) to recruit local arbaki militias in central Kunduz. Mir Alam had considerable influence in the local administration and enjoyed political connections and the protection of powerful patrons in the central government such as Vice President Fahim Qasim. He relied on these relationships to recruit hundreds of his own fighters into the arbaki militias. Mir Alam also used his control over local commander-networks to co-opt commanders from other mujahedin factions, notably Sayyaf's Itihad faction.

As an effort that was launched outside central government control, Minister Atmar's main concern regarding the arbaki militias was the empowerment of warlords like Mir Alam who maintained operational control of his militias and distributed its pay provided by NDS. The AP3, on the other hand, paid local militias directly from the Ministry of Interior, which apparently cut off commanders from controlling the patronage flow to members of local militias. By paying recruits directly, the Afghan government intended to transfer their loyalties to the state. Particular men of violence, who constitute a threat to central elites, need to be carefully managed. As chapter 5 demonstrated, the point about ALP was that local militias have to be dependent on resource flow from the central

government, and they can't become too big or powerful to threaten the state, as had happened during Najibullah's regime. There have to be self-limiting mechanisms – they only get a limited drip feed of weapons and resources.

The anti-Taliban militias were mainly drawn from Turkmen, Tajik and Uzbek communities in Kunduz. Only a few Pashtun commanders, such as Mohammad Omar (different from Governor Mohammad Omar) from Itihad faction in Khanabad set up arbaki militias. Hizb-linked powerbrokers in Imam Sahib, the Ibrahimi family set up their own militias with the help of NDS. In Qala-e-Zal, where Jamiat had limited influence, the district governor, with support from the NDS, provided weapons and funding and with the backing of the local Turkmen community invited a former Junbish commander, Nabi Gichi to establish an arbaki force ahead of the August 2009 Presidential election. The low participation of Pashtuns in the arbaki militias did not necessarily mean that it was mostly a Pashtun-Tajik/Uzbek conflict, with Taliban on one side and Uzbek and Tajik commanders on the other. In Gortepa, central Kunduz, commander Silab was a Pashtun and took up arms against the Taliban. In Khanabad, Mohammad Omar was a Pashtun arbaki commander. The hundreds of Taliban fighters who surrendered to government and joined arbaki militias in 2011 were mostly Pashtun, and subsequently fought against the Taliban.[224] What is important to note is that the non-Pashtun armed groups, particularly from Jamiat enjoyed military dominance in Kunduz. The main concern that drove local commanders to take up arms and fight the Taliban was not based on ethnic considerations. To preserve their own power, the Jamiat-dominated local administration, having exhausted other means, including help from Kabul, armed arbaki militias to fight the insurgency. Predictably, the outcome of this encounter with the Taliban further empowered jihadi commanders. The person who best exemplified this trend was Mir Alam - by fighting the Taliban he consolidated his position as the provincial strongman (Hewad 2012).

Over the next few months, with Mir Alam's militia of some five hundred, in addition to his local allies fighting alongside government forces, the Taliban were driven out from most parts of Kunduz, including central Kunduz, Khanabad, Chahardara, Imam Sahib

[224] Interview # 32, 09.01.2012.

and Qala-e-Zal. The main effort in pushing the Taliban from Kunduz has been attributed to the arbaki forces, including Mir Alam's militias, recruited by Governor Omar. At this stage US Special Forces did not play a role, as they did not arrive in Kunduz until late 2010 – as part of the additional forces deployed to Afghanistan under the terms of the military surge authorised by President Obama. Depending on the local security situation, the level of political and military fragmentation and the extent of influence commanders had over their fighters, the various arbaki units evolved in many different directions. The well-disciplined forces of Nabi Gichi, for example, enjoyed the support of his fellow ethnic Turkmen and operated under the control of the district governor. His militias brought about a significant improvement in security in Qala-e-Zal district. In contrast, ill-disciplined coteries of local militias under a multitude of jihadi commanders belonging to Jamiat and Itihad factions in Khanabad engaged in predatory activities and internal power struggles once the Taliban had been driven out of the district. Although NDS claimed that the militias were under the control of ANP, the reality in Khanabad was that commanders loyal to Mir Alam operated without any chain of command either under the authority of the district chief of police or the district governor, Nezamuddin Nasher, who had repeatedly complained about the presence of thousands of irresponsible militias and demanded that they be disarmed. In response to the abuses committed by local militias, in 2011 and again in 2012, President Karzai ordered the national army and police to disarm local militias in the district, albeit with limited success.

Although the arbaki militias were successful in temporarily holding back the Taliban, the security situation in Kunduz did not change significantly until the arrival of US Special Forces ahead of the September 2010 parliamentary elections. In 2010, ISAF commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal had identified Kunduz as a major crisis zone, second only to the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar. He began a more aggressive campaign to fight the Taliban in the region (Gebauer and Najafizada 2010). As Governor Omar had anticipated, the arrival of US Special Forces had a major military impact in weakening the Taliban in Kunduz and Baghlan (Gebauer 2010a). Their kill-capture and night raids operations, specifically aimed at Taliban commanders had a major impact on the insurgency (Gebauer 2010b). US kill-capture operations were so effective that Taliban commanders were forced to be constantly on the move and could no longer stay in their homes for fear

of being attacked at night. When weather permitted, they took to the open fields and slept in trenches or tried to find a tree to sleep under (Niazman 2010). By winter of 2010, the relentless targeting by US Special Forces forced the Taliban to retreat from Chahardara and other parts of Kunduz, where local militias belong to Mir Alam acting in concert with US forces took control.

Another major blow to the Taliban's control came ahead of the September 2010 parliamentary elections, when a much larger effort was launched to clear the Taliban from Kunduz. On his arrival in September 2010, a month after Governor Omar had been killed, Abdul Rahman Sayedkhaili, the new police chief began to hand out cash to arbaki commanders to fight the Taliban. The Interior Minister, Besmillah Khan, a former Jamiat military commander provided Sayedkhaili with the money to pay local commanders and buy off insurgents willing to switch sides.[225] Before he launched his offensive in Chahardara, Sayedkhaili delivered an ultimatum to local Taliban commanders to stop fighting and switch to the government's side. Many insurgent commanders took up his offer and crossed over. In a matter of days government media reported hundreds of Taliban surrendering to the government. As one local observer recalled: 'all of a sudden half of Chahardara came to the government side and only a few committed Taliban remained, but they were no longer as effective'.[226] The situation was turned around less by fighting and more by bribing Taliban commanders to defect to the government, which heavily depleted the ranks of the insurgency. Once they joined the government, the former insurgents-turned-arbaki were allowed to retain their arms and remain in control of their areas. Alongside armed groups from Khanabad they were subsequently used by the government to fight against the remaining Taliban notably in Gortepa area, the Taliban's main stronghold in central Kunduz, and in Imam Sahib and Dasht-t-Archi districts. In January 2011, Sayedkhaili declared Kunduz 'cleansed' of Taliban. But two months later the police chief was killed in a suicide attack.

After his death, the funding from the Ministry of Interior ended and Sayedkhaili's successor stopped paying the arbaki militias. This led to predatory behaviour from the

[225] Once constituted, the militias supplemented their income through local taxation and extortion, which has been widely reported and covered in detail by a 2011 Human Rights Watch report (HRW 2011).
[226] Interview # 32, 09.01.2012.

militiamen, extorting local farmers and traders, and turf wars among the different armed groups. The government responded with disarmament efforts in Khanabad, the most heavily populated and militia-dominated district in Kunduz. In 2011, only 51 people were disarmed and in August 2012 a second operation begun, and after three days only 12 weapons were collected from local commanders (Hewad 2012). Militia proliferation had reached such a level by April 2011 that German forces in Kunduz resorted to bringing some of them onto ISAF's payroll, using the US military's CERP[227] funds, as a way of exerting some control over them. The incorporation of existing militias by ISAF happened in parallel to US Special Forces' efforts to establish the ALP. These militias were renamed the Critical Infrastructure Protection force and located mainly in Qala-e-Zal, Chahardara and Aliabad districts. CIP was another ad-hoc response to deal with problems that might have been anticipated. The programme was implemented without any clear policy direction from ISAF or approval from the Afghan government. The total CIP force was slightly over 500: 225 in Qala-e-Zal, 150 in Chahardara and 150 in Aliabad.[228]

However, the Germans' policy of bringing local militias under the US military's patronage did not sit well with President's Karzai's objective of centralising the means of patronage and coercion. When Karzai learned about the initiative in late December 2011, he issued a decree disbanding CIP.[229] In June 2012, US Special Forces informed the German PRT in Kunduz that the US military had decided to stop payments to CIP units in Kunduz.[230] In April 2013, a Member of Parliament from Qala-e-Zal confirmed the cessation of US military payments to CIP units in the district. No longer paid, the CIP members 'had gone back to what they were doing before they became CIP. They steal, collect *ushr* and abuse civilians. Whilst a few years ago they drove the Taliban out and

[227] CERP stands for Commander's Emergency Response Programme.
[228] In February 2013, UNAMA, in its annual report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict mentioned 230 CIP members in Qala-e-Zal, far outnumbering the number of ANP in the district, which was around 25-35 (UNAMA and UNOHCHR 2013a, 50).
[229] According to ISAF, by 31 December 2012 all community based defence groups, which operated outside the structure of the Afghan forces had been disbanded and most of its members were transitioned to ALP.
[230] Interview # 75.

brought security, these days the arbaki militias have become a source of insecurity'.[231] As shown below, the arbaki militias in Kunduz later emerged as ALP.

V. The arbaki's transition to ALP

Empowered by their victory against Taliban, the arbaki commanders were well placed to co-opt the ALP two years later. The ALP emerged in light of the tense negotiations in the summer of 2010 between President Karzai and ISAF Commander Gen. Petraeus (chapter 5). As the previous chapters showed, the ALP framework produced a partial and contingent form of control over local armed groups. Compared to other provinces, the ALP was implemented relatively late in Kunduz. The strategic rationale for the ALP was to serve alongside arbaki militias as a holding force to maintain the gains that had been made against the Taliban insurgency since 2009. Since the ALP was deployed after the arbaki militias and US Special Forces had done most of the fighting, their role in direct combat against the Taliban was minimal. Security for the most part had improved. The first ALP tashkil[232] for central Kunduz was approved in November 2010. A month later, three more districts were added to the tashkil: Imam Sahib, Dasht-e-Archi and Chahardara, each district was allotted 300 ALP. The actual ALP tashkil for Kunduz in June 2012 was 1,125. Khanabad,[233] Aliabad and Qala-e-Zal districts were left out of the tashkil.[234]

From the outset provincial officials resented the role of US Special Forces in the establishment of ALP. Senior officials accused them of violating ALP guidelines in central Kunduz after evidence emerged that existing arbaki militias had been incorporated in ALP. The deputy governor, Hamdullah Danishi, a former Jamiat commander resigned from a joint commission with US forces in protest when he realised

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[231] Interview # 106.
[232] A Dari word for the formal staffing structure of government ministries or departments. It is also used in relation to the structure of Afghan security forces.
[233] Local commanders sought to include Khanabad in the ALP - these efforts did not bear fruit, which might explain the extent of rent seeking from farmers by arbaki militias in Khanabad.
[234] Qala-e-Zal and Aliabad along with Chahardara were included in CIP - only Chahardara was included in ALP tashkil.

that the Americans had already recruited pre-selected armed groups, mostly arbaki militias without consulting the local shuras or Afghan authorities - but expected the provincial government to approve them in clear violation of ALP guidelines.[235] Despite these initial delays the implementation of ALP went ahead. By September 2011 a total of 105 of 225 ALP recruits had been trained and deployed in central Kunduz. Around the same time, the recruitment of ALP in the Imam Sahib district had begun. By January 2012 the ALP in Dasht-e-Archi district was rolled out. In June 2012 the process had moved on to Chahardara district.[236] As of June 2012, the ALP had been completed in two of four districts: central Kunduz (225 ALP) and Imam Sahib (300 ALP). At this point two very different kinds of local militia programmes were going on in Kunduz: the ALP which was officially approved by the Afghan government, and the CIP which was run by ISAF but lacked central government sanction, even though in theory CIP units were subordinated to district police chiefs. The ALP programme added 1,200-armed men to the local security scene. These statistics are an important reminder that the ALP remains a small factor in the larger security dynamics - 1,200 ALP are a drop in the ocean compared to the presence of thousands of armed groups throughout Kunduz.

The ALP focused on both Pashtun and non-Pashtun districts where the Taliban insurgency had been strongest. Arming Pashtuns through the ALP, as had happened in Baghlan, was viewed with concern by the Jamiat-dominated administration. Local powerbrokers were determined to avoid such an outcome in a province like Kunduz, with a large Pashtun population. Since most Pashtuns were suspected of harbouring sympathy for the Taliban - which is one reason why they were marginalised from access to jobs in the government and the security apparatus – Jamiat sought to make Kunduz a Northern Alliance and Tajik fortress in northern Afghanistan - and to the extent possible free of Taliban. As with the arbaki militias, the ALP in Kunduz was disproportionately captured by Tajik (mainly Jamiat) and Uzbek commanders, especially in central Kunduz, which is ethnically mixed. In districts with majority Pashtun populations such as Chahardara and Dasht-e-Archi, most of the ALP commanders belonged to Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen

[235] Interview # 36.
[236] Interview # 73.

factions. The local police and arbaki militias linked to local powerbrokers regularly abused Pashtun villagers in those districts – shaking down travellers, taxing farmers and violently repressing people suspected of supporting the insurgents (Cecchinel 2013).[237] It was often difficult to say whether pre-existing ties to the Taliban resulted in punitive raids from ALP and arbaki militias, many of whom were the insurgents' primary target, or the need for Taliban protection - and hence support for them - resulting from the predatory behaviour of local militias toward the local Pashtuns already marginalised form power and resources in the province. Since the non-Pashtun ethnic groups were generally considered to harbour anti-Taliban feelings, they showed greater inclination to join the ALP and fight the Taliban. In areas where they expected Taliban retaliation, like in Chahardara, few Pashtuns came forward to join the ALP, reducing their overall strength in the ALP force. According to Minister Atmar, the ALP in Baghlan and Kunduz was hijacked by local powerbrokers because militia commanders rather than local elders and shuras became the channel for recruitment and selection of ALP members. Senior Jamiat-affiliated government officials, notably Interior Minister Besmillah Khan are believed to have used ALP resources to strengthen Jamiat's jihadi networks in Kunduz. An International Red Cross employee with knowledge of the ALP in the north observed that 'as long as Bismillah Khan is minister of interior he is likely to arm his Jamiat faction and under-arm rivals' to preserve Jamiat's political and military dominance.[238]

The extent to which arbaki militias had infiltrated the ALP is difficult to ascertain since details about the background of ALP commanders and recruits are not easily available. The names and party affiliation of ALP commanders in central Kunduz, where the first ALP units were established in early 2011, indicated that most of the ALP commanders were former jihadi and arbaki commanders linked to Mir Alam and Mohammad Omar.[239] Other prominent ALP commanders in central Kunduz included Hafiz Cherik, Amir Shah,

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[237] In September 2012 commanders Qadirak and Faizak, linked to Mir Alam attacked the village of Kanam in central Kunduz, killing 12 and wounding 8 civilians, all of them Pashtun on the pretext that they were supporting the Taliban.

[238] Interview # 7, 13.05.2012.

[239] According to the provincial police department, there were 120 ALP in Gortepa and Telawka in central Kunduz. They were divided in 9 to 12 men units under a commander, under the overall command of Hafiz Cherik, linked to Mir Alam. When American Special Forces began the ALP in Kunduz, Hafiz's existing militias were incorporated into the force. Interview with ANP officer responsible for ALP in Kunduz, 14 June 2012. Kunduz.

Ghulam Ali, Juma Khan, Ishaq Nizami and Ala Nazar. All of them had fought the Taliban in 2009 and 2010 and maintained small groups of militias. Ala Nazar was an Uzbek jihadi commander, at one point disarmed under the DDR programme. In mid-2012, he was in charge of an ALP unit of 25 to 30 men in Dam Shakh village, Alchin region of central Kunduz. In 2009, he had been asked by the head of NDS to start a local arbaki militia to fight the Taliban. Discussions with Ala Nazar in June 2012 revealed that he was approached by US Special Forces in the summer of 2011 to join the ALP.[240] He and his men were given three weeks' training and then introduced to local elders as the new ALP unit in his village. All of his men in the ALP unit were close relatives, because he only trusted his own family members and Uzbek associates. He claimed to have invited some Pashtuns to join his ALP unit, but they refused, allegedly, since most of them had sympathy for the Taliban – 'they would rather fight the infidels than support their cause'.[241] His Uzbek ALP unit operated in a village that included nearly one thousand families. There were around one hundred land-owning Pashtun families in the village. The large number of Uzbeks and their dominance of the ALP in the village might explain the reason the Pashtun minority had links with the Taliban - they probably perceived the Uzbek ALP with suspicion and in turn sought protection from the Taliban. Most Uzbeks in the village, like Ala Nazar himself, were landless farmers. But in their new role as ALP members they were now ruling over their former overlords – partly reversing some of the old class divisions.

The rape of a Kuchi girl

Earlier in the chapter I explained the extent to which insurgents, after surrendering to the government found their way to arbaki militias. Similarly, the ALP absorbed many former insurgents into its ranks, though sometimes with ambiguous effects as illustrated by the case of Ishaq Nizami, a former Itihad and Taliban commander. In 2010 and 2011, Nizami had reportedly served as a Taliban commander and fought against government and

[240] Interview # 82.
[241] Ibid.

NATO forces. When military pressure on the insurgents increased he defected to the government. As in Baghlan, the US Special Forces' kill-capture operations and night raids had a devastating effect on the insurgency in Kunduz. The instinct for self-preservation drove many insurgents to choose reconciliation over fighting. After reconciling with the government, Nizami, like so many former insurgent commanders, emerged as a pro-government arbaki commander. Later on, he joined the ALP and became commander of five ALP units in the Tobrakash region of central Kunduz. He served as deputy to Hafiz Cherik, the main ALP commander in central Kunduz. Nizami and his men were involved in a highly publicised case of the rape of a young kuchi (Pashtun nomad) woman named Lal Bibi. In June 2012, he was named as a suspect in the case. As ALP commander, he was invited to mediate a family dispute between one of his sub-commanders and the family of Lal Bibi. He ruled in favour of his deputy, commander Khudaidad, and arranged a forced marriage between the deputy and Lal Bibi.

Nizami's subsequent trial and conviction in November 2012 was the result of President Karzai's direct intervention. Abdul-rab Rasoul Sayyaf, a prominent jihadi leader to whose political faction Nizami belonged and the provincial police chief, Samiullah Qatrah tried to protect Nizami from being prosecuted by the state. They pressured the family of the victim to reach a settlement outside the court using a traditional jirga.[242] When the family refused and demanded Nizami's arrest, the police chief claimed that the area where Nizami had his ALP base was insecure and the police could not go there to arrest him.[243] President Karzai intervened in the case after a public outcry and ordered Nizami's and his cohorts' arrest and disbanded the ALP unit in Tobrakash.[244] The conviction of Nizami and his men for rape, rather than a settlement through *baad*[245] also shows that when the government had the will to act, it also had the power to bring perpetrators to account. Nizami and his four accomplices were sentenced to sixteen years

[242] Interview # 32, 09.01.2012.
[243] Interview # 76. The author was in Kunduz when the arrest warrant for Nizami was issued and managed to travel to his ALP base, located a short drive from Kunduz city. The area was obviously secure; it was evident that the discourse of insecurity was an excuse for not wanting to arrest Nizami.
[244] Interview # 100.
[245] It referred to a traditional practice involving the exchange of money or young women to settle a dispute. Under the 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law, the practice of *baad* is considered illegal.

in prison for the crime (A. J. Rubin 2012b; Sukhanyar and Rubin 2012). These brief accounts of the ALP under commanders Ala Nazar and Ishaq Nizami revealed the extent to which the ALP programme was manipulated to serve divergent agendas. They point to a lack of transparency in recruitment, vetting, command and control, and suggest how the power of a host of armed groups - including so-called illegal armed groups, former insurgents and proxy forces linked to US Special Forces - has been reinforced by the ALP programme. They also show the complex web of brokering relationships and patronage networks linking global actors (US military) to local and national elite politics - and a remote village in Kunduz to powerful patrons in Kabul. These dynamics are key to understanding centre-periphery relations and how local armed groups operate and from where they derive their power.

The problematic nature of the ALP programme, in particular its capture by militia commanders, is best illustrated by the case of Lal Bibi. The central character in Lal Bibi's unhappy story is her cousin, Isa, a young ALP foot soldier who served under one of Nizami's sub-commanders.[246] Despite warnings from family members and community elders that Isa was a lowly criminal and should not be accepted into ALP, he was welcomed by Nizami and enrolled into his ALP unit. Isa was given an AK-47 weapon and very little training. There was no shura involved and no government institution vetted him. To protect themselves against future liability, Lal Bibi's family publicly disowned Isa. While serving under commander Khudaidad, one of Nizami's sub-commanders, Isa developed an illicit relationship with Khudaidad's daughter. One night the father caught Isa in bed with his daughter. He took him into a field outside his house and tied him to a tree and brutally tortured him for many days. Lal Bibi's father and grandfather were asked by Khudaidad to own up to Isa's crime as demanded by *Pashtunwali*, the Pashtun code of honour. They were told to kill Isa in order to compensate for the harm he had caused to Khudaidad's family and honour. The family refused, reminding Nizami's men that the family had publicly disowned Isa after Nizami had accepted him into his ALP unit. They were now free to deal with him as they pleased. Nizami's men knew that killing Isa without a court verdict or the decision of elders in a jirga would get them into

[246] The following account is based on interviews with Lal Bibi's family, journalists and the Human Rights Commission. Interviews were conducted between 9 to 15 June 2012 in Kunduz.

trouble with the law, so they decided to resolve the problem through a tribal jirga. Commander Nizami was asked to officiate the hearing. Lal Bibi's family and a few elders were asked to appear before him. The family was told that if they were unwilling to kill him then the only other way to wash the stain of this insult was for Isa to marry Khudaidad's daughter and in exchange Khudaidad will have to receive a girl from Isa's family. Since Isa did not have any siblings - being an orphan, he had only one cousin, Lal Bibi - it was decided that Lal Bibi would marry Khudaidad. Despite protests from Lal Bibi's family, Nizami and his sub-commanders personally escorted Khudaidad's daughter and Isa to Lal Bibi's family tent and left them there. They then forcibly took away Lal Bibi, along with a sheep as her dowry. They beat her father when he tried to prevent the militiamen from taking his daughter against her will.

Local observers argued that the government's failure to involve community elders in vetting and recruitment of ALP members had resulted in this gruesome outcome. Human rights activists explained that the vetting of ALP recruits that served under Nizami was carried out by the provincial police department but without the involvement of local shuras or community elders. This appears to be the case for most other ALP units, as illustrated by the example of commander Ala Nazar and his unit. In reality, US Special Forces, the Afghan intelligence service and the provincial police were mainly responsible for recruiting ALP cadres in Kunduz. The provincial peace council[247] was only involved if Taliban insurgents were being transitioned from the insurgency into the ALP. According to the head of the provincial council - a constitutionally-elected body - despite repeated objections from the Kunduz governor, deputy governor, chief of police, and council members regarding violations of ALP procedure, the recruitment forms of ALP members in central Kunduz were brought to the council *after* they had been selected, trained, and armed by US Special Forces, and then council members were asked to sign them.[248]

The disregard for ALP procedure, as showcased in the above examples, and most important, the dominance of NATO-and-government-backed local militias by Tajik,

[247] Under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme, launched in 2010, the government established provincial peace councils to facilitate the defection and reintegration of insurgents.
[248] Interview # 33.

Uzbek and Turkmen commanders, particularly in districts where Pashtuns constituted a majority, and their predatory behaviour toward the local population was in turn seized upon by President Karzai and some of his ministers to question the credibility of the ALP programme in Kunduz. President Karzai argued that the Americans created the ALP in Kunduz for their own 'political purposes'.[249] I interpret this statement to mean that the US forces' support to local commanders outside central government control had undermined the fragile balance of power needed to accommodate the various competing power centres in the province. The American's dominant role in arming local militias had effectively sidelined centralising elites like Karzai from the bargaining process and the patronage relationships with local powerbrokers. Control over the means of coercion and the flow of patronage by the central government was key to subordinating local commanders to central authority. As explained in chapter 5, concerns over the destabilising effects of direct US military support to local commanders led the Karzai government to nationalise militias. It involved disbanding or replacing with ALP or APPF those militia units that Afghan officials suspected had been created by foreign forces outside the preview of the central government.[250] As shown below, such efforts resulted in a partial and ambiguous outcome.

VI. The entanglement of arms and politics in Kunduz

In the following pages, I provide an eyewitness account of a government-led attempt to disarm arbaki militias in Khanabad, the most populated district in Kunduz under the sway of various militia groups. The encounter between government officials and local commanders took place in September 2011. It was filmed by a local journalist, who provided a copy of the video recording to the author. The following description is based on review of this material and additional interviews with journalists, government officials and local commanders. This encounter is important not only for symbolic reasons; it provides a rare epistemic and discursive moment to seriously engage with the role played

[249] Interview # 103.
[250] Ibid.

by ideology, political mobilisation and national aspirations in the broader political dynamics involving local militias analysed in this thesis. It stems from an overall concern with conventional writings on Afghanistan, both scholarly and policy-oriented literature which has a tendency to overemphasis the importance of either private motivations such as the quest for economic resources (or greed), the pursuit of private vendettas to settle old scores or parochial concerns related to the protection of one's family and tribe, or disputes over land and water (Gopal 2014a; Gant 2009; Martin 2014), or political motivations linked to ethnic (or *qaum* differences) or tribal grievances while positing explanations for local conflicts (Roy 1990; Barfield 2010; Lieven 2012).

This relates to a general perception and theoretical tendency informed by rigid, binary categories linked to dualist and mutually exclusive explanations (and motivations), such as the binary division between greed and grievance or formal and informal as two competing and mutually exclusive spheres of authority. It points to some of the problems with our understandings of violence and contemporary conflict, particularly when it comes to interpreting the identities or actions and motivations of actors. Kalyvas' explanations for political violence has problematised the dichotomy of private and political violence, instead, he insists on the perplexing combination of political and private identities and actions in civil wars, understood not as binary conflicts but ambiguous processes that foster complex sets of identities and actions (Kalyvas 2003, 475). If 'the motives underlying action in civil war are inherently complex and ambiguous' then it is possible to conclude that politics and economic considerations, for example, can never be considered as discrete or separate forces (ibid 2003, 276).

This episode offers a unique window into the complex ideological universe of militia commanders and their political self-representation in the face of growing public criticism of their role in violent power struggles and abusive treatment of civilians. The arbaki commanders typically conceived their political identity in relation to the anti-Soviet jihad and resistance to the Taliban and viewed their role as defenders of religion and the country. They frequently brandished their jihadi credentials to silence any criticism aimed at the mujahedin in order to justify their right to dominate power in the post-2001 political order. Bhatia argued that the question of the mujahedin and the contest over its meaning after 2001 was 'a competition for legitimacy' and 'the right to rule, conduct

violence and retain combatants' (Bhatia 2007, 91). The legacy of militias in Kunduz vividly illustrates the political implications of state support to local armed groups; they typically stake claims to state resources and seek accommodation in the post-war political order. The theoretical and empirical insights into the role of violence, local militias and patrimonial politics in the re-emergence of state structures after 2001 helps to contextualise President Karzai's frequent criticism of local militias in the north. As previously noted, the president's coalition of warlords-strongmen dominating the cabinet and provincial administration is a reflection of the patrimonial order he has built up since coming to power in 2001 (chapter 5).

The point is that violent entrepreneurs (warlords and militias) are central to the understanding of the violent foundation of state power, as opposed to the liberal stress on the role of power growing out of legitimacy and the myth of the state as the expression of 'common interest', cleanly dissociated from all sectional interests of class, race, religion, etc. (Abrams 1988, 76). Against this broader historical background, President Karzai's criticism of local militias can be interpreted as an attempt by an accommodating centralising ruler excessively concerned about his legacy to deflect attention from long-standing patrimonial alliances with local strongmen and regional warlords. By villainising arbaki militias in the north as thugs and criminals, he essentially de-politicised their discourse without marginalising them from power. These seemingly opposing narratives, one representing militia commanders as defenders of the country (inlaw) and a separate state discourse portraying them as bandits (outlaw) fittingly encapsulate the political struggles of the last decade or so in Afghanistan.

This point resonates with Gallant's argument that the underlying distinction between law and outlaw is murky, since 'bandits helped make states and states made bandits' (Gallant 1999, 25). The activities of bandits or outlaws in the periphery provided the pretext for the states' intrusion into the countryside that translated into forcible policing. It was through a process of either co-optation or crushing rural outlaws in the periphery that states experienced a 'border effect' that strengthened their capacities (McCoy 1999, 130). It is worth emphasising the point that bandits and military entrepreneurs have not always been antithetical to modern states; they were deeply insinuated in the processes of state formation and played important roles in the centralisation of power. This history

‘demonstrates the complexity of the relationships between states and society’s men of arms over which of them wields coercive violence legitimately’. Therefore, ‘inlaw or outlaw, border guard or bandit, privateer or pirate were labels applied by the state, and depending on the designation chosen, the activities of those groups were thus deemed either legal or illegal. If the former was chosen, these men were patriots and defenders of the state; if the later, then they became the scourges of the nation, whose eradication became a national priority’ (Gallant 1999, 25–26). In so far as the state is understood as an exercise in ‘the legitimating of the illegitimate’ (Abrams 1988, 76), the distinction between inlaw and outlaw will always be ambiguous, if not openly contested.

The above-mentioned disarmament drive had resulted from repeated complaints made by the population of Khanabad and the district governor, Nezamuddin Nasher. The district governor was a popular figure among the people of Kunduz for his relentless criticism of abusive conduct by arbaki militias and its impact on worsening security. The technocratic-minded district governor, whose power was no doubt threatened by the reported presence of thousand of local militias, was the most vocal government official consistently drawing attention to the problem of militias in Khanabad. He had warned that if the militias were not disarmed before the departure of international forces, there was a strong likelihood that Kunduz could descend into another civil war, reminiscent of the early 1990s. Arbaki militias and local armed groups were implicated in a variety of rent seeking activities - including illegal taxation, kidnapping, land grabbing and turf wars that involved attacking and killing rivals. The public outcry over such excesses prompted President Karzai to order the ANSF to forcibly disarm local militias in Khanabad.

A delegation comprising of security officials from ANA, ANP, NDS and accompanied by the heads of the provincial council and Khanabad shura and representatives of NATO’s northern command met with a number of prominent mujahedin and arbaki commanders in Khanabad, including Mohammad Omar, a powerful Pashtun jihadi commander from Sayyaf’s Itihad faction. The purpose of the meeting between government representatives and local commanders, which quickly took on the appearance of a tribal jirga was to implement President Karzai’s decree ordering the disarmament of local armed groups that were the source of so many complaints he regularly received in Kabul. What is worth

noting is that the disarmament campaign began not as a military exercise - with police and army kicking doors and arresting people and confiscating guns, which some officials advocated - but rather as a political outreach and tribal diplomacy – reflecting the power of local commanders.

The medium through which the interface between the government and local strongmen was facilitated relied upon the role of elders using the vehicle of the jirga. It involved identifying the problem and discussing it among all the participants - including giving the militia commanders a major say in the proceeding to allow them to present their side of the story - and reaching a consensus about what the solution should be. This attested to the tradition of resolving a dispute between two aggrieved parties in a jirga. To accommodate the power of arbaki commanders, the legal requirement of the presidential decree– forcible disarmament- was compromised in favour of diplomacy and negotiation. The bargaining that unfolded was a demonstration of the nature of political contestations and the meaning of legitimacy and power in post-2001 Afghanistan. The jirga meeting began with the account of abuses and crimes committed by arbaki militias in the district. The head of the Khanabad shura, an influential Pashtun landowner and tribal leader, reminded the audience that the people of Khanabad had suffered enough at the hands of abusive militias. Because of the competition between different armed groups over the control of territory and *ushr*, the security situation had deteriorated considerably. It was time, he concluded, to disarm the arbaki militias and restore order. That is why the government delegation had come to the district to implement the presidential decree.

Mohammad Omar, whom I quoted at the beginning of the chapter, spoke on behalf of the assembled group of local commanders and reminded everyone that two years ago (in 2009) it was the government that armed the arbaki militias in order to push back the Taliban and restore government control in Kunduz. Today, the government had decided to disarm local commanders, even though the Taliban insurgency had gained more strength since they were driven out of Kunduz in 2009. He insisted that this was not the right thing to do because arbaki militias were actively involved in securing the areas under their control. If disarmed, those areas will definitely fall to the Taliban. One of Mohammad Omar's lieutenants got up to reinforce his argument. He reminded the government delegation:

> *This is the third time that the government had armed jihadi commanders to fight the Taliban. But once the Taliban threat had been contained, the government then turned around and disarmed local commanders - leaving them in the cold to fend for themselves and their men. The men you want to disarm today were armed by your government a few years ago - when you needed them to save Kunduz from the Taliban. Our men fought and died protecting this government. I buried many young men with my own hands. The Taliban hang arbaki from the trees if they are caught. And yet the government wants to disarm us. Where is the justice in all this?*

He then specifically hit back against the criticism of arbaki militias by the head of Khanabad shura, a wealthy and respected landowner. He reminded the gathering that the arbaki militias bravely fought against the Taliban at the government's urging. They were the real mujahedin and deserved to be honoured, rather than humiliated by forcibly taking their guns. Without weapons how could they protect themselves against the Taliban? Jihadi leaders and mujahedin commanders frequently deployed the discourse of jihad and the 'real' mujahedin to discredit their critics and sideline the views of those who did not take part in the anti-Soviet jihad or anti-Taliban resistance. It basically represented a direct challenge to any calls for the disarmament of commanders, even though rhetorically they had agreed to surrender their weapons to the government. In reality they had no intention of surrendering their arms.

This encounter in Khanabad is an example, as noted by Barkey (1994), of attempts by coalitions within the state to gain greater control by brokering deals with wielders of violence in the periphery. This involved selectively disarming some groups and arming others as a route to the centralisation of power. An analogy can be drawn between the tactics of the Ottoman rulers and President Karzai in relation to brokerage and patronage politics - and a less coercion-intensive path to state centralisation. The strategy of co-opting particular men of violence, who constitute a coercive threat to central state elites – for example bandits in Ottoman Turkey - illustrate the empirical reality that historically the state's claim of monopoly over violence was frequently contested by rival claimants. The mujahedin commanders in Khanabad did not attempt to fight or oppose the central state. Instead, they attempted to bargain with state elites through contestations over the meaning of political legitimacy and over the control of elite privileges, including the right to rule and retain armed groups (Bhatia 2007, 92). The encounter demonstrated that the

arbaki militias – like bandits in Ottoman Turkey - were the creation of the state and essentially reinforced the state's logic of patrimonial politics. They were formed as part of the mobilisation and demobilisation strategies for war. Predictably, at war's end the militia commanders sought accommodation in the post-war political order and bargained with state elites toward that end. In exchange for state patronage, they became the vehicle for extending state control to the periphery, notably through enhanced policing and containing the armed opponents of the state (Barkey 1994).

A tested way for rulers and states to attain political legitimacy is through the ability to provide protection or security to productive groups in the population (chapter 2). The arbaki commanders in Khanabad tried to justify retaining their weapons and armed groups by mimicking the 'state talk' of protection. They pointed to their role in driving the Taliban from power in 2001, and when the insurgency erupted in 2009 in defending Kunduz against Taliban insurgents. They perceived themselves as agents of protection, not predation. As commander Mohammad Omar argued, arbaki militias played a key part in providing local security and given the growing strength of the insurgency, it was not the right time to disarm mujahedin commanders. He insisted that had mujahedin commanders not taken up arms against the Taliban in 2009, today they would have been ruling the province instead of Karzai. In other words, the Afghan government needed mujahedin commanders to contain the Taliban insurgency and retain control in Kunduz. Many local commanders in Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz maintained that it was a mistake to disarm mujahedin commanders in the early years of the intervention. DDR and DIAG disarmed thousands of battled-hardened mujahedin after 2001 before the new army and police were ready to provide security at the local level. That created the space for the Taliban to re-emerge.

Given this discourse it was not surprising that the attempt to disarm arbaki militias in Khanabad largely failed. Although individual light weapons supposedly used for self-protection were shown to the authorities, these weapons were not taken away from the militiamen. The larger weapons that were frequently used in armed clashes remained buried in secret stashes. Government authorities were well aware of the locations of most of these arms depots and the commanders who controlled them. Most local commanders maintained strong links through party affiliations to senior provincial and central

government officials. That meant no aggressive action was taken against them and they easily bypassed the presidential decree. Only a few dozen minor commanders and their men were symbolically disarmed. Many others succeeded in retaining their weapons. In August 2012, the government made a second attempt to disarm arbaki commanders in Khanabad, after the local population demanded government action to end insecurity in the district. After three days, the ANSF collected only twelve light weapons (Hewad 2012). Despite the two attempts, in the end only a handful of weapons were confiscated. A senior police officer argued that the government knew each and every one of the commanders and how many men and weapons they had. The provincial police could have disarmed these armed groups. What was standing in the way was not the lack of capacity or resources. Senior officials in the province and their political patrons in Kabul simply lacked the inclination to disarm local militias on whom they relied for control at the local level.[251] Central state elites, like vice president Fahim Qasim, depended on local strongmen, like Mir Alam, to maintain local powerbases and centralise power. Therefore, in the absence of disarmament, the symbolic gesture of going to Khanabad, demanding that local commanders surrender their weapons and the eventual collection of a few dozen weapons was necessary to show that President Karzai's decree had been implemented.

Brokerage and patronage-based relationships often made local powerbrokers more powerful than centrally appointed officials without a local powerbase. As noted earlier, political alliances between central and peripheral elites were cemented through a perplexing combination of relationships and identities involving marriage, business, military and social (ethnic) connections. At critical junctures local commanders with links to national figures of power proved more capable in repulsing insurgent attacks and ensuring stability than reformist minded governors and chiefs of police who lacked local armed followers. Reformers and technocrats appointed by Kabul were at a disadvantage since they could not (officially) acquire or retain armed groups like commanders and warlords had done. The example of Nezamuddin Nasher, district governor of Khanabad, is instructive. After a series of failed disarmament attempts and unsuccessfully opposing

[251] Interview # 74.

the drive to arm local militias, he eventually left his post and emigrated to Germany. This outcome pointed to the futility of liberal reforms in a contested political environment, where commander-networks and patronage-based alliances are far more effective means of dominating power.

President Karzai recognised this potential and over the years built an expansive patronage-based network as a means of centralising power. The large amount of international aid flowing into Afghanistan, especially when channelled through state institutions helped him consolidate his hold over power. State patronage from Kabul channelled through many layers of sub-national administration (governor, police chief and line ministries) is an important source of rent seeking for local powerbrokers and their national patrons in sustaining political alliances and recruiting followers. As a result, state institutions became the main arena for the accumulation of power and wealth by coercive means, as control over state structures ensured access to domestic and international resources. Moreover, government appointments became a major source of leverage for President Karzai to expand his patronage network, recruit allies, reward loyalists and punish rivals. Since the president approved all senior appointments, this 'power of appointment' was a critical source of Karzai's power (chapter 5).

At the same time, control over licit and illicit economic resources, especially public lands and opium-cultivating areas was an important consideration for local powerbrokers. In a competitive environment, control over valuable resources was only possible by means of armed groups, especially if state sanctioned such as the national police or government-backed militias like ALP. As a result, local militias have been proliferating in many parts of the country, partly in response to the rising insurgency. Uncertainties about the future were particularly pronounced in a province like Kunduz where the influence of Jamiat networks is among the strongest in northern Afghanistan, but where in 2013 and 2014 the Taliban had regained control in a number of districts, including Chahardara and Dasht-e-Archi and areas surrounding the provincial capital.

VII. Re-enter the Taliban

The military gains of the Taliban in the early months of 2015 has once again led to increased government reliance on local militias to defend key districts in Kunduz. President Ghani began his term in office (September 2014) promising to disarm so called illegal armed groups, a reference to arbaki type militias such as those discussed in this chapter. However, the poor performance of the national army and police forces in countering the Taliban offensive in early 2015 has forced the president and his government to call on local mujahedin commanders, men like Mir Alam, to rearm their supporters in order to defend Kunduz against the Taliban (Mashal, Goldstein, and Sukhanyar 2015). The Taliban advance on Kunduz had been gradually building up. In late 2014 press reports indicated that the Taliban had encircled a number of key districts and were closing in on the provincial capital of Kunduz. In late September, reports warned of the imminent fall of the most contested districts, Dasht-e-Archi and Chahardara to Taliban control. Security in central Kunduz and the northern district of Imam Sahib also deteriorated significantly (Cecchinel 2014b; Hamdard 2014). In Khanabad, the most densely populated and militia-dominated district, the Taliban's influence was on the rise, mostly helped by the fragmented nature of political and military power (Bleuer and Ali 2014).

The Taliban, as noted earlier, were adept at exploiting factional rivalries in order to strengthen their position at the local level. In early 2015, the ALP lost considerable ground to Taliban advances in many parts of Kunduz, prompting the central government to send reinforcements of regular army troops and national police in an attempt to thwart a Taliban military takeover of central Kunduz and strategic districts like Imam Sahib and Chahardara. Fighting between government forces and Taliban raged for many days around the provincial capital and within the district centre in Imam Sahib. It appears that the Taliban advance has only momentarily been contained. Meanwhile, the government has tried to arm an estimated two thousand local militias, mostly by reaching out to former arbaki commanders to mobilise their militias for a new round of confrontation with the Taliban (Sultani and Johnson 2015).

The Taliban's military successes against Afghan security forces, particularly the ALP and the level of insecurity in early 2015 showed that the security situation in Kunduz had regressed to levels that were prevailing in the spring and summer of 2009, at the height of the insurgency in the north, when the arming of arbaki militias started. The dramatic deterioration of security in Kunduz serves as a reminder of the fragility of the post-2001 political order, which has been continually disrupted by the Taliban insurgency and contestations over power among contending elite groups. The deteriorating security and Taliban's territorial gains in Kunduz exposed the shortcomings of the US counterinsurgency doctrine and the limitations of a security strategy that in part depended upon poorly equipped ALP units to serve as frontline troops in the fight against the insurgents. Many ALP members opted for survival rather than to fight insurgents. There were growing reports of ALP forces when outnumbered and out-gunned deciding to surrender to the Taliban or abandoning their checkpoints. In late 2014, ALP commanders argued that unless they received support from ANSF they wouldn't be able to sustain the fight against the insurgents, that more areas would fall to the Taliban (Cecchinel 2014b). However, by early 2015, the national army and police seemed in need of support from local militias.

The ANSF has been under huge pressure from the insurgency since the transfer of security responsibilities from NATO troops to Afghan forces (beginning in 2012). The high casualty rates of Afghan security forces pointed to the intensity of the fighting and their own deficiencies. According to US government estimates, between March 2012 and May 2014, over 2,000 ANA personnel were killed and nearly 13,000 were wounded in battle (SIGAR 2014, 102). The ANA, for example, lost 900 soldiers during the first six months of 2014. This meant that on average, the insurgents killed around fifteen army and policemen each day (Najafizada 2014). The ANSF's casualties in 2015 dramatically increased following the start of Taliban's spring offensive. In the first four months of 2015, more than 1,800 ANA and ANP personnel were killed in action, and another 3,400 were wounded, representing 65 per cent higher ANSF casualty rates than during the same period last year (Mashal, Goldstein, and Sukhanyar 2015). These were staggering losses for Afghanistan's security forces which on the average had an attrition rate of between 25-30 per cent (Goodhand and Hakimi 2014, 24). The ANSF in their current form are not

fiscally sustainable and it is unclear for how long Western donors will continue to fund the estimated $4 billion per annum to sustain them. The greatest threat to stability, therefore, is less the existence of a few hundred militias per district in the form of the ALP than the danger that after 2014 an oversized and unevenly trained armed force will decompose and fragment into a myriad of competing militias groups, as it did after the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992 (ibid 2014).

Rising insecurity in many parts of the country has led to renewed calls for the remobilisation of jihadi militias since the ALP and the ANSF had proved ineffective in the fight against the insurgents. In early 2015, Kunduz was preparing itself for yet another phase of militia formation, similar to the arbaki experiment in 2009. Despite public demands and commitment by the new government to disarm illegal armed groups in Kunduz, the growing insecurity meant that predatory militias were not likely to be disarmed anytime soon because of the enduring threat of the Taliban. Militia commanders in Kunduz, and elsewhere, used this threat as a bargaining chip; to build control over local armed groups and weapons, generate rents and demand special privileges, and rejuvenate patronage networks and relationships with foreign forces, provincial power holders and the central government. As noted earlier, militia commanders in Khanabad managed to circumvent government efforts in 2011 and 2012 to disarm local armed groups by arguing that the Taliban threat continued to persist and if the government took away their weapons they wouldn't be able to defend themselves and the areas they controlled. At least in the case of Kunduz that prophecy had come true – that the 'barbarians' were coming, which meant that local commanders had yet another chance to acquire more arms and resources to rejuvenate and expand their armed groups on the grounds that they were fighting the Taliban.

VIII. Conclusions

In Kunduz, arbaki militias and the ALP emerged out of a complex security environment shaped by the re-emergence of the Taliban, the deployment of US forces and the holding of elections – all in the context of a precarious political settlement. The counter-response to the insurgency was organised by armed groups of Northern Alliance factions, led by

Jamiat, whose power was directly threatened by the re-emergence of the Taliban. Militia formation therefore had little to do with protecting communities and was primarily about protecting the new power structure at the provincial level. As a result, it was initially a local initiative with little involvement from the central government or US-NATO forces. The counterinsurgency response hinged on various forms of conviviality between local commanders, government officials and foreign forces. Arbaki and ALP type local defence initiatives became an important vehicle for jihad-era commanders like Mir Alam, whose power had declined during the second half of the 2000s, to rejuvenate his armed networks and transfer the burden of clothing, feeding and paying militiamen to the government and NATO forces – and re-emerge as the provincial strongman. In turn, local militias seemed like an attractive solution to foreign forces – as cost-effective auxiliaries in the fight against the Taliban, and to hold ground against insurgents after the withdrawal of US and NATO forces. These varied considerations have made local militias an enduring feature of the Afghan political landscape since the US military intervention in 2001.

After partially containing the Taliban insurgency and bringing a measure of security, arbaki militias engaged in predatory behaviour – their abusive activities gave rise to significant law and order problems. As this chapter demonstrated, government efforts meant to disarm unruly militias proved ineffective and had little impact on reducing their coercive power. Local militias were an integral element of the local power structure and enjoyed the protection of powerful patrons in Kabul and the region, which explains why the disarmament campaign in Khanabad failed. As such local militias in Khanabad were not interested in actual rebellion or curtailing the expansion of state control to the periphery. What they sought was state patronage and a role in the provision of local security. It also suggested that attempts by centralising elites in Kabul to gain control using patronage-based deals with local strongmen, often resulted in tenuous outcomes. The Khanabad example showed that the picture was more complicated than the popular imagery of warlords holding power in the periphery in opposition to the central government. At the same time there were no indications that the central government attempted to exert a monopoly over the means of violence by disarming local armed groups. What the bargaining between government representatives and local commanders

in Khanabad represented was the re-negotiation of a more durable patronage pact, evident in government attempts to exert influence over local commanders and the latter's desire to secure state patronage. The presence of so many armed groups reflected a highly variegated security landscape where multiple armed groups were competing for power and resources. The ALP was just a small part of this landscape. The deterioration of security in late 2014 and early 2015 prompted the Afghan government to once again increase reliance on local militias in an attempt to contain the insurgency despite earlier pledges to disarm such armed groups.

The occasional criticism of warlords and local militias by central state elites should be seen as a legitimating strategy to conceal President Karzai's dependence on their power. More important, the president's criticism of local militias was strategically useful in solidifying his objections to the dominant role of US Special Forces in establishing local militias, and justifying attempts to bring them under government control. It suggested that President Karzai was not opposed to the government's reliance on local militias per se. In an interview he made it clear that in principle the ALP was an 'excellent idea' to improve security at the local level, provided it was implemented in partnership with local elders and remained under firm government control.[252] His objections related to the control of the peripheral political economies linked to US forces from which local commanders derived their power. By dominating those economies of violence and marginalising US forces, Karzai hoped to control the brokerage and patronage relationships, co-opt local powerbrokers and their armed networks and subordinate them to the central government.[253] As this chapter demonstrated, this remained a partial and ambiguous achievement.

The dominance of commanders and the flexibility displayed by the US military in establishing local militias were key factors in explaining the large-scale appropriation and capture of ALP by local commanders. The immersion of ALP in such a setting helped to expand existing patronage relationships and consolidated the power of local armed groups. In view of this reality, the US military discourse about empowering the tribes and

[252] Interview # 103.
[253] Interview # 47, 10.04.2012.

restoring authentic Afghan customs and institutions sounded hollow and might well be a thin veneer masking an actual landscape dominated by armed men and predatory practices (chapter 6). It is within this broader context that the discursive positioning of jihadi commanders in Khanabad in terms of contestations over political legitimacy and control of armed groups must be placed.

Finally, the dominance of the security and administrative structures in the province by non-Pashtuns in a province with a large Pashtun population in the north was already a problematic issue before the re-emergence of Taliban in 2009. It is likely to further contribute to Pashtun feelings of marginalisation, a dynamic which in the past the Taliban were able to adeptly manipulate and resulted in overtures of protection from the Taliban - in which case further armed clashes can be expected. For the foreseeable future, local Pashtuns who aren't members of armed groups linked to local strongmen that are affiliated with central figures of power are caught between the Taliban and hostile local militias dominated by Tajik and Uzbek commanders in a provincial power structure from which they are largely excluded.

Chapter 9: Fighting for and over the patronage of armed groups

I. Introduction

This thesis has explored the role of the ALP, within a broader analysis of a range of US/NATO and government-backed militias (including previous iterations of ALP) in the conflict dynamics, mediation of centre-periphery and intra-periphery bargaining relationships over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion, and processes of state centralisation and state consolidation in the context of the post-2001 NATO military involvement and the Taliban-led insurgency in three provincial settings in Afghanistan: Wardak, Baghlan, and Kunduz. The study has combined research findings from three historicised provincial case studies concerning the role played by militias and their leaders in local policing and the ways that militias helped shape contestations over the control of resources and the means of coercion, with historically situated analysis of varying forms of conflict, political bargaining and patrimonial politics which have been central to processes of state formation in Afghanistan. This is coupled with theoretical insights that locate the study's findings in a more global, historical political economy literature addressing the intertwined histories of violence (and violent entrepreneurs) and processes of state formation and state consolidation.

The main argument of the thesis is that by focusing attention on the role of militias and their leaders in the local economies of violence, and the complex relationships they tend to build with local, regional, national and transnational centres of power in order to access resources and build patronage networks– and the role played by violence, resource flows and brokerage/elite politics in meditating such relationships, it is possible to develop a better understanding of the nature of the emergent state in Afghanistan. As previously noted, 'post-conflict' spaces are sites of contested sovereignty where control over power and resources involved struggles between global, national and local elites (Heathershaw and Lambach 2008; Heathershaw 2013). Understanding the global dimensions of these processes are vital given the decisive role played by foreign forces in Afghan politics and the war against insurgents, and the critical significance of international resources in cementing relationships between different groups of actors and

hierarchies of power (global, national, local). Since the relative stability of the post-Bonn political order was largely underpinned by the resource flows of Western donors, mainly in the form of military and development spending - at the heart of this 'rented peace' was the nexus between international money and Afghan politics (dominated by military entrepreneurs) that helped consolidate a vast patrimonial order since 2001 (Aikins 2012, 4).

Situated within a broader analysis of the shifting politico-military landscape in post-2001 Afghanistan, the research has highlighted the importance of competing interests and contradictory logics in the formation of militias, ostensibly to improve security and help re-establish state authority in the periphery. The study has demonstrated that the impact of such efforts was not unequivocal; the varied outcomes depending on how militia programmes intersected with localised political economies of violence and provincial power structures, and the nature of the complex relationships such groups tend to negotiate with local, regional and national (and international) figures and coalitions of power. The thesis is the first process-oriented study to explore the role played by militias in local conflict dynamics and processes of state consolidation in post-2001 Afghanistan. It is also the first study to date to place the role of such groups into a broader historical context by drawing on insights from Afghanistan's modern political history concerning the role played by violence, militias and patrimonial politics in the conflictual and non-linear trajectory of state formation in Afghanistan and newer and older debates in historical political economy literature and a range of disciplines in the social sciences about the intertwined relationship between coercion, resources, and patrimonial practices in processes of state formation and state consolidation.

In highlighting the violent foundation of the state and the contested nature of statebuilding processes, the thesis has challenged the normative underpinnings of the mainstream literature by pointing to the problems that a historicised political economy approach raises for liberal understandings of violence and the state. In addition to being a substantial contribution to the understanding of violence, militias, policing and statebuilding in Afghanistan, the thesis makes important contributions to an expanding body of literature about the centrality of coercion and violent entrepreneurs (including militias), political bargaining and patrimonial practices to processes of state formation and

the contentious politics of statebuilding with relevance to theory and practice beyond Afghanistan.

These themes and issues were explored in several stages in the thesis. **Chapter two** described the theoretical and analytical framework of the study. It drew attention to the contested nature of the political economy of peacebuilding to show that exogenous statebuilding is a precarious process, leading to uneven and unstable outcomes. Historical political economy analysis highlighted the centrality of coercion and the material and symbolic competition between contending elite groups in emergent political orders in order to expose the limitations of the liberal position that tends to edit out the role of violence and contestations over power and resources in statebuilding. I argued that contemporary states must be considered in relation to transnational processes in order to account for the contested nature of sovereignty and political authority in post-war and conflict-affected societies.

In **chapter three**, I explained the methodological framework that guided the research process. It provided an overview of the unstable political and security dynamics in post-2001 Afghanistan and the ways in which the context shaped the methodological framework of the study and the trajectory of my research. The extended case method, which focuses on events or situated practices offered the flexibility needed to conduct research in such an insecure setting on a series of emergent processes surrounding the formation of local militias. Furthermore, I discussed the ethical and security challenges related to my research. **Chapter four** explored the historical and sociological context of shifting governance arrangements and the conflictual and non-linear development of state power in Afghanistan. Central to this process were changes in the regional and domestic patterns of political and economic reproduction and the notion of political legitimacy in specific contexts and over different time periods. Therefore, the nature of bargains and contestations over political authority among contending elite groups varied considerably from one historical period to another. The war years (1978 onwards) hold particular significance because of the growing decentralisation of the means of violence, the regionalisation of politico-military networks and the emergence of commander-networks and a regionalised war economy.

Chapter five provided an account of the political and security dynamics in post-2001 Afghanistan, beginning with the military and political fragmentation during the early years of the intervention as a result of US military support to Northern Alliance factions. This was followed by an uneven process of accommodating warlords and mujahiden commanders in state institutions as a step toward reassembling the post-2001 state. The growing strength of the insurgency in the second half of the decade led the US military to experiment with militia formation in an attempt to improve security. But ad-hoc militia formation mainly by US forces represented a potential threat to the emergent political order dominated by a coalition of elites in the centre and their local powerbases and the economic interests underpinning the elite bargain. Afghan government attempts to regulate US-backed local armed groups and the flow of patronage led to the emergence of the ALP, which as the empirical chapters showed remained a partial and contingent regime of control.

The three empirical chapters together presented a critical analysis of the US military's engagement with local militias in Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz. Research findings from the individual case studies have been summarised in section II of this concluding chapter (hence will not be repeated here), which also forms the basis for the comparative analysis of the ALP and its previous iterations in the three provincial settings.

II. Summary of research findings

1. The impetus behind the mobilisation of militias

The research sought to understand the motivations and interests of the different actors and institutions that played a critical role in the mobilisation and after 2010, nation-wide scaling up of militia formation in the context of the post-2001 NATO involvement and the Taliban-led insurgency.[254] Contrary to the one-size-fits-all approach of most

[254] Some of the material on which the following sections are based have featured in Goodhand and Hakimi (2014).

international interventions, the assumed homogeneity and dominance of international actors, and the commonly perceived lack of agency ascribed to local elites, the ALP programme has demonstrated that the political and security regimes that resulted from an unstable assemblage of global, national and local forces (and resources) were often ambiguous and indeterminate, involving curious alliances, complex bargaining, messy compromises and unstable hierarchies.

As argued in **chapter five**, the way the ALP and its previous iterations emerged and were implemented were the result of complex bargaining and accommodations over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion between different actors and institutions with competing sets of logics and interests, that changed over time, reflecting shifts in conflict dynamics, political imperatives and military doctrines. The motivations of those involved, including international actors, national political elites and provincial power holders varied and included fighting the Taliban and other insurgent groups; securing the nascent state and supplementing its security forces; protecting government officials, local powerbrokers or one's community; maintaining the political status quo and undermining the power of rivals; re-negotiating or balancing power relations; accessing external resources and extending patronage relationships (for example to unofficial armed groups or through reintegrating insurgent groups); and centralising control over existing or newly formed armed groups and the means of patronage that flowed to such groups.

External factors

The ALP and its previous iterations became an attractive solution for US and NATO forces because it easily aligned with counterinsurgency doctrine and its emphasis of working with and through local defence forces, particularly local militias directly mobilised and trained by US Special Forces (Nagl 2010; Kilcullen 2009; Jones and Munoz 2010; Jones 2012; Bolduc 2011). In the context of 'tribal' Afghanistan, this translated into support for arbaki type militias. The ALP and its previous incarnations were justified in part as a culturally appropriate and cost-effective but temporary measure to supplement Afghan and foreign forces' efforts to counter the insurgency and provide

security at the local level. The research demonstrated that some of the existing literature on the ALP and other government-backed militias was full of essentialised narratives about Afghan culture and tribes, which essentially functioned to marginalise critical analysis of external interventions and the imperial origins of liberal counterinsurgency and peacebuilding and statebuilding discourses (Goodhand and Sedra 2013; Duffield 2007; Pugh 2005; Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards 2012; Khalili 2012).

Apart from the influence of counterinsurgency doctrine, there were other considerations as well, notably cost efficiencies and risk transfers associated with support to local militias. US commanders estimated that one ALP cost $6,000 per year compared to an ANA soldier who cost $30,000.[255] Such calculations led to a proposal to reduce the more expensive ANSF and increase the size of the ALP. As argued in **chapter six**, by outsourcing violence and repression, states can reduce international and domestic legal and political liability, as evidenced by the lack of accountability for the crimes in Wardak, allegedly committed by US Special Forces and Afghan militias under their control. This obviously raises concerns about the post-2014 presence of US intelligence and military assets and the future role of the CIA and US Special Force in arming Afghan paramilitary units for counterterrorism missions in the region (Clark 2013a) - a military scenario that was the focus of debates between US military commanders and President Ashraf Ghani in the summer of 2015.

Deficiencies in the regular forces and their inability to respond to insurgents in rural areas where government and NATO forces had limited presence also contributed to US/NATO support for local militias. Their lack of institutionalisation in the ANSF and dependency on foreign forces ensured a more rapid mobilisation of local militias in support of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations alongside US Special Forces. This also translated into lack of control on the part of Afghan government over US-backed militias, which ultimately led to the 'nationalisation' of militias under the ALP programme, as explored in **chapter five**. NATO troop-contributing countries have justified the withdrawal of foreign forces and the transfer of security responsibilities to

[255] Interview # 102

Afghan forces on the assumption that the ANSF had acquired the necessary military capabilities to ensure security and contain the insurgency after the withdrawal of its forces. The research demonstrated that NATO's assumptions were misplaced, the deficiencies of ANSF and the ALP were clearly demonstrated in the case of Wardak in **chapter six** – which led to the adoption of more brutal tactics by US Special Forces to contain the insurgency and resulted in possible war crimes - and during the recent insurgent push to overrun a number of district centres, including the provincial capital in Kunduz, as explained in **chapter eight**. The lacklustre performance by the ALP and ANSF in Kunduz has led to renewed calls for arming local mujahedin commanders as had happened in 2009.

Support for militias generated a mixed reaction among international actors. From the outset, there were ambiguities about their legal and financial status, operational remit and institutional linkages. As argued in **chapter five**, European donors mainly invested in the ANP, the regular police in order to improve the rule of law. They were reluctant to invest in a paramilitary force like the ALP that was primarily established to suppress the insurgency, which they perceived as an attempt by the US military toward an overall para-militarisation of the police force. There were doubts about whether US efforts in this direction would actually contribute to the strengthening of Afghan state institutions or policing as hoped by reform-minded Afghan officials (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011, 17).

Domestic considerations

From the beginning, the idea of arming local militias generated quite a lot of controversy inside Afghanistan. Senior members of the government were divided on the question of whether to support or oppose arming militias. For example, Karzai's defence minister, Rahim Wardak opposed the idea on the grounds that it would reduce international and domestic support for the ANSF. His interior minister, Haneef Atmar saw local militias as a pragmatic solution to the problem of local insecurity and supported the idea of arming militias, so long as they remained under central government control, and linked it to the broader project of centralisation and greater control over local armed groups, partly by

breaking the patronage chain that linked local militias to their commanders through direct salary payments to local recruits and subordinating them to the district chief of police.

As demonstrated in **chapter five**, the motivations of domestic and international actors were also not necessarily aligned. President Karzai initially sought support in expanding the national police force to meet the demand for additional security forces to improve security in border areas and prevent incursions by the Taliban across the Afghan-Pakistan border. He eventually proposed the idea of the arbaki police after US refusal to expand the national police force. Although the US began to invest in the national police after 2005, US commanders remained wary of supporting local militias until 2008. But the spread of the insurgency from its southern heartland to other parts of the country altered the US position and after 2009, US commanders began to scale up the formation of local militias. The AP3 experiment in Wardak was the first such attempt at a joint US-Afghan militia programme that was designed for national level scaling up. Although ANAP preceded AP3, it was only implemented in a few southern provinces and was disbanded in 2008.

As argued in **chapter six**, AP3 was originally envisaged for deployment in border areas with Pakistan, not in Wardak's villages. The decision to deploy AP3 in Wardak was partly influenced by the spread of the insurgency to the environs of Kabul – by that time securing Kabul became a priority for US forces. Minister Atmar envisaged the AP3 as both a revival and 'modernisation' of the traditional arbaki concept, which would involve a state-community compact and division of labour, as had been practiced in the past.[256] In return for a role in the provision of security in the border areas, local communities would receive development aid from the government. It was presented as an indigenous mechanism of security, and clearly differentiated from the US sponsored *Sons of Iraq* militia programme in Iraq. The agreement that paved the way for the establishment of the AP3 was tightly negotiated under President Karzai's supervision to ensure that the

[256] The AP3 was envisaged as a community based approach to security, similar to the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) as a community based approach to development. Before serving as Minister of Interior, Atmar was the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and his approach to AP3 was presumably influenced by his close involvement with the NSP, one of the largest development programmes implemented by MRRD.

Afghan government maintained control over the force, but in practice US Special Forces played a much more decisive role in its implementation, prompting President Karzai and his Interior Minister, Haneef Atmar to accuse US forces of violating the agreement.

As demonstrated in **chapter five**, while disagreements continued, US forces began to expand the formation of militias under the CDI/LDI programme, which the Afghan government initially opposed. The ALP eventually emerged as a compromise between the US ambition to scale up the use of local militias and President Karzai's attempts to control the local armed groups and the flow of patronage that the US support to these groups represented. It appears that President Karzai saw the ALP and a sister programme - the APPF, as an opportunity to 're-nationalise' security, that is to regularise and assert control over the means of coercion and patronage, including various US-backed militias and private security companies. In practice though, the ALP represented a partial and contingent form of control and as the empirical chapters showed, US forces continued to arm local militias outside government control in violation of the ALP agreement.

As demonstrated in **chapters seven and eight**, the ALP programme also became entangled with the government's national reconciliation and reintegration programme. It provided an opportunity for reintegrated Taliban fighters to join government-backed militias and pave the way for a political settlement with insurgents. In the absence of security guarantees and viable employment opportunities, factors that had undermined disarmament efforts in the past, the ALP became a funding disbursement mechanism for reconciled insurgents. The instrumentalisation of the ALP for reintegration purposes was initially opposed by US Special Forces since their goal was to use the ALP to defeat the Taliban militarily, but eventually gave in to the temptation to reintegrate insurgents into the ALP. As the two chapters showed, although a number of insurgents opted to join the ALP, this fact alone did not change the military balance of power in favour of the government, as many fighters continued to move in and out of the insurgency and government-backed militias.

At the provincial level, the competing interests of local elites translated into political pressure to expand the complex bargaining process surrounding the implementation of the ALP programme. Provincial governors, police chiefs, local strongmen, and members

of parliament saw the ALP as another external resource flowing from the central government to the provinces over which they could bargain with central elites and use it to renew or extend patronage relationships and consolidate their power bases in the districts, including the opportunity to regularise unofficial militias under their control. As noted earlier, the ALP played a critical role in the complex centre-periphery bargaining relationships.

Apart from cementing centre-periphery relations, the ALP also played a critical role in re-negotiating existing power relations and access to state resources. As **chapter seven** demonstrated, the US-led War on Terror created many winners and losers in 2001, and those who ended up being marginalised from power or were excluded from the formal provincial security apparatus because they happened to emerge on the wrong side of the war, such as Hizb-e-Islami affiliated commanders in Pul-e-Khumri, saw the ALP as the instrument with which to leverage power and protection. Following a long-standing pattern, the weaker party in a conflict seek to leverage external support from more powerful actors (e.g. the central government) in order to balance the power of local rivals. The ALP in Baghlan played well into this dynamic, and as a result, the Pashtun-dominated ALP emerged as a rival force to the Jamiat-dominated national police. This outcome was at odds with the declared goals of the ALP, originally envisaged as a supplementary force to augment the regular forces, in particular the national police.

As demonstrated in **chapters seven and eight**, arbaki and ALP forces in Baghlan and Kunduz also contributed to significant law and order problems; government-backed militias frequently preyed on those they were paid to protect. Although militias may provide short-term military advantages and cost less in terms of resources, they can be politically costly for those who rely on them. As Kalyvas argued, militias are supposedly formed to engage in protective violence (e.g. to protect the state against insurgents), but often mete out predatory violence, in the form of abuses against civilians (Kalyvas 2006). Therefore, the Baghlan and Kunduz examples point to the central paradox of the ALP programme: the relative security gained came at the price of significant losses in

governance and state legitimacy, thus exposing the non-linear logic of the VSO-ALP programme (chapter five).[257]

The future of the ALP

As demonstrated in **chapter five**, the ALP was originally envisaged as a small-scale, temporary local defence force to compensate for the shortage of NATO and Afghan regular army and police forces in insecure rural areas. The ALP was subsequently trained as a paramilitary force in order to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level until Afghan regular forces assumed the overall responsibility for security. But the withdrawal of foreign forces, the continued expansion of the insurgency and deficiencies in the ANSF led to the decision to retain the ALP, expand its size and further extend its mandate for five more years (Cloud and Bengali 2013; Hodge 2013). Whilst the size of the ALP continued to expand, from ten thousand in 2010 to thirty thousand two years later mainly on the grounds that the ALP was more cost-effective – the ALP required 40 per cent less investment than the national police, NATO which provides the lion's share of the more than $4 billion annually needed to sustain the ANSF decided to downsize the more expensive national army and police force. In early 2015, however, US and Afghan authorities stated that the current size of the ANSF would be maintained to contain the growing strength of the Taliban insurgency.

The US military's goal was to have, by the end of 2014, thirty thousand ALP personnel in 150 districts throughout the country. In the four years since its establishment, the US military has invested nearly $214 million in the ALP. The ALP at about thirty thousand strong is estimated to cost $121 million per year (SIGAR 2014, 100). Apart from its disproportionate political impact, the statistics illustrate that the ALP has become a valuable strategic resource in the local security architecture, helping to further fuel

[257] The Village Stability Operations, a key element of the US counterinsurgency strategy was implemented by US Special Forces and comprised three seemingly interrelated elements: security, governance and development. It operated on the assumption that improvement in one area, say security, would automatically lead to improvement in other areas such as governance. For further consideration of the VSO concept see (Bolduc 2011).

contestations between different actors over the control of resources and the means of coercion at both the national and local level.

The decision to expand the ALP indicated the US military's preference for paramilitary forces in dealing with the Taliban insurgency. A commonly used measure of ALP effectiveness was the extent to which Taliban insurgents prioritised targeting the ALP over other forces. US commanders frequently made references to Taliban statements that killing one ALP was worth ten American soldiers as a proof that the ALP was successful in the fight against the insurgents.[258] The reason the Taliban prioritised the killing of ALP fighters over American troops was, according to NATO, because insurgents saw them as the main challengers to their rule in the villages. The ALP presence at the local level arguably made it more difficult for insurgents to operate; mainly by denying them free movement and access to support structures within local communities. At the same time, the ALP presence also led to the intensification of conflict, and as one ALP commander pointed out, it brought the war to the doorsteps of the villagers.[259]

However, in view of ALP's performance against insurgents in Kunduz in early 2015, the data used to measure the ALP's success should be scrutinised more critically. To begin with, the ALP were lightly armed units, mostly located in contested areas and exposed frontlines as the first line of defence against better armed insurgents, which made them an easy target for insurgent attacks. They typically operated without backup support from the ANSF. ALP members lived and patrolled in their villages, and they had nowhere to run when attacked by insurgents, unlike the ANA or ANP, which typically carry out a search-and-sweep operation and then withdraw to their bases. This makes the ALP and their families more vulnerable to retaliation by the insurgents. Because the ALP are a lesser military threat to the insurgents compared to the ANA, they are less able to negotiate conflict management pacts with the Taliban, that is agreeing not to contest each other's control of territory. Although the original rationale for not providing heavy weapons to ALP personnel was perhaps justified in view of the problematic history of government-backed militias during

[258] Interview # 102.
[259] Interview # 24.

Najibullah's regime, this decision significantly reduced the ALP's effectiveness in the battle against the insurgents.

The shifting security dynamics in Kunduz, as discussed in **chapter eight**, cast serious doubts over the US military's positive assessments of the ALP (and ANSF) and its broader counterinsurgency strategy. ALP forces have suffered the brunt of Taliban attacks, losing hundreds of fighters in the most recent Taliban offensive in Kunduz. Afghan government data showed that in the first six months of 2014, 600 ALP fighters had been killed and 900 wounded throughout the country - this represented a 70 per cent increase in attacks in 2014 compared to the previous year (8am News 2014). US government statistics point to even higher casualty figures: 985 ALP had been killed and 1,737 injured in 2014.[260] Morale among ALP fighters has been low because of low wages, infrequent payment (or nonpayment) of wages, and job insecurity. Most ALP members were worried about how long the ALP would exist and consequently whether they would be left jobless and having to fend for themselves. This dynamic in the past resulted in militias having to forcibly tax the local population and engage in the criminalised economy, further eroding the legitimacy of the programme.

Depending on how the ALP was perceived, views on its future varied considerably. Some Afghan and international officials argued for ALP's absorption into the regular police force. Others were in favour of disbanding it because of concerns over the proliferation of local armed groups. The US military and local commanders with vested interests in retaining their militias were in favour of extending the ALP mandate. By the end of President Karzai's term in office (September 2014), the Afghan government had not approved a clear policy in relation to the ALP - whether to keep, expand or disband it. In view of ANSF deficiencies in the fights against insurgents in early 2015, the new government headed by President Ashraf Ghani proposed to increase the size of the ALP from 30,000 to 45,000 troops (ICG 2015).

The signing of the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) in September 2014 paved the way for the US and NATO to keep around twelve thousand troops in

[260] These figures are taken from the ICG report on the future of the ALP (ICG 2015).

Afghanistan after 2015. This included thousands of Special Forces who would have responsibility for counterterrorism operations in the region and providing support to Afghan forces in order to contain the Taliban insurgency. Given the close association between US Special Forces and local militias in the past decade, the ALP and other militias are likely to remain a central element of the Afghan government and NATO's post-2014 counterterrorism and stabilisation mission in Afghanistan.

2. Varied outcomes of contestations over the means of coercion and patronage

The research sought to understand how the ALP and its previous incarnations have shaped contestations over the control of the means of violence and the flow of patronage at the provincial level. Comparative insights drawn out from individual case studies highlighted the ambiguous and paradoxical outcomes of the ALP at the provincial level. The three cases were selected for a comparative analysis because the ALP and local militias have played an important role in the political and security dynamics of each of these settings, and because the differences and similarities across them in terms of social structures, economic development, political history, conflict dynamics, and varying outcomes of the ALP experiment make for revealing comparisons. The individual cases emphasised the heterogeneity and complexity of the local political landscapes, and depending on the ways the ALP programme intersected with local dynamics, it produced vastly different outcomes.

The comparative approach to case studies demonstrated the need for a historicised approach to the study of violence and armed groups, contestations over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion, and processes of state centralisation and state consolidation in contemporary Afghanistan. Therefore, context and history serves as a corrective to generalised accounts of the ALP and the study of local militias in Afghanistan without consideration of their role and impact in a particular context and time period. The empirical chapters of the thesis showed how the ALP programme was mediated and translated through complex bargaining relationships between international actors, national elites and provincial powerbrokers in the context of an intensifying insurgency. These were essentially political processes unevenly shaped by the security

environment and the economic interests of diverse actors in each context over different time periods. The same programme looked very different in one context compared to another.

As such, evaluating the impact of militias in terms of peacebuilding and statebuilding outcomes is complicated by the existence of these competing sets of motivations and contradictory interests. Defining success or failure will ultimately depend on how such categories are formulated; this is not a purely technical exercise. Success or failure is also tied up with particular normative and political judgments about what is desirable (or not) at a given time and the nature of the relationship of militias and their leaders with external actors, regional strongmen and elites in the central government, as demonstrated blow. For example, those NATO troop-contributing countries that were keen to facilitate a hasty withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan, such as the US and Britain, had a vested interest in presenting optimistic evaluations of Afghan security forces' capabilities, because that justified its decision to transfer security responsibilities from Western forces to Afghan forces, even though many Afghan officials were sceptical about the ANSF's ability to effectively contain the Taliban insurgency on their own without the support of NATO after 2014.

In **chapter six**, the research examined the emergence and evolution of government-backed militias in Wardak province. As demonstrated in the chapter, in Wardak the ALP programme was an implant by foreign forces aiming to stabilise a security context that was far more complex than originally imagined. In comparison to Baghlan and Kunduz where a dominant group had emerged after 2001, the security and political architecture in Wardak was far more fragmented and open to contestation by rival armed groups. The fault lines in the struggle for ascendency were more complex than the Pashtun-Tajik and Pashtun-Uzbek dynamics observed in Baghlan and Kunduz. Wardak remained a hotbed of internal factional power struggles among different armed groups of more or less equal strength, many of them belonging to the same ethnic group (Pashtun) – although Hizb-e-Islami remained the dominant political force in many districts.

Pashtun communities remained divided in terms of support for the government and the insurgency, and close family members may stand on opposite sides. A good example of

this phenomenon can be observed in Nerkh district, where villages remain divided between Hizb-e-Islami and the Taliban, with frequent armed clashes between them. Joining a government-backed militia often inflamed local power relations, which is why some Pashtuns resisted the government's overtures, which also explains the difficulties encountered in AP3/ALP recruitment in many Pashtun areas. The Hazara and Tajik powerbrokers used access to AP3 and ALP resources to ensure the exclusion of Pashtuns, notably the nomad seasonal migrants from the economic resources of the Central Highland region.

As a result of such complex dynamics, an already fragmented and volatile politico-military context was made worse by the injection of US-backed militias and support to anti-Taliban armed groups (such as Hizb-e-Islami in Nerkh district). The multiple experiments in militia formation in Wardak negatively affected the local conflict dynamics and intensified contests for power and control over territory between different armed groups and the Taliban. The final legacy of US military engagement in Wardak, including allegations of war crimes and abuse of civilians was deeply disconcerting in view of earlier pledges by US commanders to prioritise the protection of the civilian population over killing insurgents, a key tenet of NATO's population-centric counterinsurgency.

In **chapter seven**, the research examined the emergence and evolution of the arbaki and ALP militias in Baghlan province. It explored the dynamics of contestation over the control of resources and the means of coercion between two rival armed groups after 2001: Jamiat-e-Islami affiliated Tajik commanders and Pashtun commanders linked to Hizb-e-Islami in Pul-e-Khumri district. As argued in the chapter, in Baghlan, the Hizb affiliated (Pashtun) commanders' concerns over the loss of power and resources after 2001 provided the impetus to form local militias, beginning in Pul-e-Khumri. The ALP became a vehicle for politically marginalised Pashtuns to re-negotiate the Jamiat-e-Islami (and Tajik) commanders' dominance in the provincial administration and security apparatus, although such efforts in the end produced ambiguous and contradictory outcomes. It can be seen as an attempt by the excluded to leverage external support (from the central government or the insurgency) to increase their access to power and resources and balance the power of local rivals.

The ALP was mainly used by Pashtun powerbrokers and local commanders as a means of defence against Taliban attacks or protection against predation by government forces, and in some instances perpetrated abuses against local Pashtun civilians. As a result of power struggles between the two groups, in particular because of contestations over the control of the means of coercion, the arbaki and subsequently the ALP militias emerged as rivals of the national police and the provincial administration dominated by Jamiat commanders. To all intents and purposes, two separate and competing security and governance regimes emerged in Pul-e-Khumri, without significantly enhancing the central government's power in the province as evidenced by frequent appointments and dismissals of senior government officials in the last decade or so. The fragility of the political settlement, partial control of territory by different armed groups, the contested view of local security, distrust of government forces and Taliban military activities are some of the factors that help explain the proliferation of local militias in Baghlan after 2009.

In **chapter eight**, the research examined the shifting trajectories of the political and security dynamics in Kunduz. It retraced the emergence of arbaki militias and their transition to the ALP in this key northern province. As demonstrated in the chapter, in Kunduz, a former Taliban stronghold in the north with a majority Pashtun population, the expansion of the insurgency threatened the power of the dominant coalition that had been catapulted to power as a result of the US military intervention in 2001. As part of a counter-response, arbaki and ALP militias were mainly appropriated by a Jamiat-led coalition of local commanders. The militias became the instrument to preserve the existing order against the threat of the Taliban. This brought short-term security, but further marginalised the Pashtun population and increased the likelihood of a violent contestation of the political status quo in the future, as indeed happened in early 2015.

After a partial victory over the Taliban in 2009, arbaki and ALP militias engaged in turf wars and contributed to significant law and order problems in Kunduz. The central government's efforts to reign in abusive commanders and their militias were repeatedly thwarted by powerful commanders and provincial powerbrokers with longstanding links to national figures of power who depended on them for maintaining their power bases in the province. By resisting disarmament, local militias were not rebelling against the state

or resisting the expansion of state power into the periphery. Instead, they exploited its weakness in the periphery to improve their bargaining position vis-à-vis elites in the central government with regards to access to resources, the control of local armed groups, and a role in the provision of local security.

Then in late April 2015, the Taliban came close to overrunning the provincial capital, Kunduz city, leading to calls for arming more arbaki militias to reinforce the regular forces' efforts to contain the insurgency. As in the past, deficiencies in regular forces have once again led to an increase in government reliance on local militias as a bulwark against the Taliban. It was not realistic, therefore, to disarm militias when the government at the same time relied upon such groups to contain the Taliban insurgency. As events in 2015 demonstrated, the insurgency in Kunduz has yet again created the space for mujahedin commanders and militia leaders to revive their patronage of local armed groups and re-assert their authority; local strongmen like Mir Alam apparently played a crucial role in mobilising and arming arbaki-type militias in early 2015.

3. Implications for theory and practice

In this final section, I reflect more broadly on the key insights gleaned from the research and highlight some of the main implications of the research findings for theory and practice. As the empirical chapters demonstrated, the research findings help us to understand the war-policing-statebuilding nexus.[261] For the purposes of this study, it refers to the role played by militia in policing and counterinsurgency,[262] and the ways in which militias helped shape core-periphery and intra-periphery bargaining relationships (or elite politics) over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion (see for example Barkey 1994).

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[261] On the historical and conceptual convergence between war and policing into a complex war-policing assemblage in Western-led interventionism, see Bachmann et al. (2015).

[262] Policing in liberal counterinsurgency is generally understood to mean the governing of space (to deny insurgents space in which to operate) and the welfare of the populations. Policing as a technology of liberal interventionism is aimed at the establishment of 'domestic' order, and ultimately to preserve and enhance state power in conflict-affected societies, representing instances where the logics of war and policing blur and bleed into one another (Bachmann, Bell, and Holmqvist 2015, 1–11).

As argued in **chapter two**, the intertwining of the histories of war-making and of state-making has been well documented by Tilly and others. Policing, understood as a 'military-diplomatic apparatus' (Foucault 2007), tended to occur in the shadow of this process, and involved the management of small scale violence (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013, 3); often occurring in parallel with the gradual disarmament of the population and the expropriation (by the state) of policing functions from local communities. In contrast to liberal notions that posit war and policing as discrete and separate events, historicised political economy approaches have shown how the two notions, both historically and conceptually, have always been connected (as in Tilly's notion of war-making abroad and state making at home, through the development of civilian institutions, including policing). This historic trajectory of state formation has involved a shift from states which ruled through 'despotic' or raw coercive power, to those which governed through 'infrastructural power' (Mann 1984). This shift is often associated with policing and technologies of governance such as mapping and surveying that make society legible and renders it 'governable and administrable' (Dean 1999, 29).

The mainstream literature emphasised a series of essentialised or negative aspects of violence and states' reliance on and involvement with militias. The existing literature on the ALP and other government-backed militias in Afghanistan mainly addressed the problem of human rights abuses committed by such groups and the danger they presented to the authority and legitimacy of the state (see for example HRW 2011; ICG 2015). Reports commissioned by the US military generally presented a more positive picture of foreign forces' involvement with local militias, often based on essentialised reading of Afghan history and culture or disputed evidence from the field (see for example Gant 2009; Jones and Munoz 2010; Jones 2012; Bolduc 2011). Only rarely have such reports presented a more critical assessment of US-backed militias in Afghanistan (Cloud and King 2012; Saum-Manning 2012; Felbab-Brown 2012).

As argued in **chapter two**, the liberal discourse on violence and militias emphasised the positive correlation between the presence of militias, armed conflict and state fragility. Warlords and militia commanders are equated with violence and destruction and viewed as antithetical to social order and in opposition to the state. Through their centrifugal tendencies they decentralise the means of violence, weaken central authority and reverse

the processes that led to the centralisation of state power. While these perspectives shed some light on militias' potential role in conflict dynamics and the decentralisation of the means of violence, they did not provide a basis for a more nuanced and historicised understandings of militias and their role in the war-policing assemblage and processes of state centralisation and state consolidation. This poor fit between the existing literature and the processes through which the ALP and its previous iterations were conceived and implemented – and the argument that militias played a crucial role in local conflicts and the reassembling and consolidation of state structures in the context of the post-2001 NATO involvement in Afghanistan - necessitated a more thorough theoretical and analytical engagement with historicised political economy and anthropological perspectives in order to locate the study's findings in historical literature concerning the interconnections between violence, militias, policing and processes of state formation.

The analytical approach discussed in **chapter two** and the detailed consideration of Afghanistan's modern history presented in **chapters four and five**, combined with an in-depth analysis of the roles played by ALP and other pro-government militias in the conflict and power dynamics of three provincial settings, as discussed in **chapters six, seven, and eight** emphasised the centrality of coercion (and violent entrepreneurs, including militias), political bargains and patrimonial practices in the historical emergence of modern states and the processes of state consolidation in post-2001 Afghanistan. Unlike most mainstream accounts of warlordism and militias and their one-dimensional relationship with states (essentially as spoilers and state-breakers), the research found no direct correlation between militias and state breakdown or state fragility, pointing to the complexity and symbiotic relationships between men of violence (bandits, warlords, militias) and states (Gallant 1999). This is supported by evidence from the case studies.

In the historical literature on state formation, warlords and military leaders are characterised as important figures in the processes of state-making and centralisation of power, essentially as state-makers. The study of militias can be enhanced by closely examining the interconnections between violence, brokerage politics, policing and statebuilding. Taking inspiration from Norbert Elias' work on the connection between violence, the 'civilizing process' and state-making, Charles Tilly emphasised the state's

monopoly over the means of violence by arguing that states arise out of war-making. Although Tilly mentions the role of bandits and militias in state formation, his historical analysis mainly deals with wars between states (Gallant 1999, 39–40). With a commitment to the historicity of states, Tilly argued that war and preparations for war were the origin of the modern state. The impulse of war-making by rulers led to the centralised control over the means of coercion and greater centralisation of power. War-making as such resulted in the construction of centralised, hierarchically-organised, territorialised modern states (Tarrow 2015).

Historicised approaches concerning the role played by violence, militias and political bargains in processes of state formation have questioned the assumption that building a Weberian monopoly over the means of violence is a necessary pre-condition for state formation. State formation was a gradual process, and historically, most states (domestic and imperial) acted as brokers rather than as monopolists of the means of coercion. States routinely practiced violence devolution – that is when states relied on militias to manage violence by proxy (Ahram 2011b). For a long time this was the typical pattern of state development in feudal Europe. Imperial powers like Britain used the system of indirect rule to arm tribal militias in the North West Frontier Province of India in order to police the frontiers of the empire during the nineteenth century (Marsden and Hopkins 2011). Liberal counterinsurgency has frequently borrowed from and selectively built on racialised colonial discourses to justify 'policing by tradition', which in Iraq and Afghanistan involved arming thousands of local militias by US forces (see for example Khalili 2012).

Contemporary internal conflicts often feature militia groups in supportive roles to the state in the fight against insurgents. These represent situations wherein the state's monopoly over the means of violence and its sovereign authority are being contested by 'non-state' armed competitors. Historically, militias have been mobilised for many reasons, and states have frequently relied on them to fight off organised armed resistance to the state or in order to police their frontiers. Gallant's and Barkey's works are instructive in their treatment of bandits and violent entrepreneurs and the different ways in which they were insinuated in processes of state formation. In situations where a central government is unable to impose a monopoly of violence, military entrepreneurs

and bandits typically developed and tended to negotiate with states over violence rights and access to resources (Gallant 1999, 40). During periods of uneven state consolidation, bandits in marginal zones played a catalytic role in state formation by forcing states to impose control over their frontiers. This body of literature showed that bandits and military entrepreneurs have not always been antithetical to modern states or a manifestation of state breakdown. Historically, militias as a class of violent entrepreneurs have played a central role in processes of state formation and state consolidation, a point supported by the case studies. Gallant's argument that 'bandits helped make states and states made bandits' continues to have some relevance today (Gallant 1999, 25).

Given the symbiotic relationships between men of violence and states, the distinction between inlaw and outlaw, state and non-state, regular and irregular in the Afghan context is often blurred in terms of legal status, institutional linkages, legitimacy and accountability of the various armed groups. In this sense, the difference between ALP and the ANP should not be overstated. At times the regular police has been more predatory than local militias in some areas. As the Baghlan case study demonstrated, the ANP was part composed of factional militias that were simply rebranded as 'national police' after 2001.

The empirical chapters sought to bring attention to the importance of militias and their leaders, and the complex relationships they had developed with local, regional and national (and international) centres of power, and the role played by local conflicts and patronage networks in mediating centre-periphery bargaining relationships over access to resources and the control of the means of coercion in processes of state centralisation and state consolidation. The research demonstrated that, contrary to the mainstream liberal discourse, militias - and men of violence more generally, have been central to the forms of 'elite bargains' and coalition politics that facilitated the consolidation of state power in post-2001 Afghanistan.

This approach to the intertwined relationship between coercion, men of violence and statebuilding resonates well with the historical development of state power in Afghanistan, viewed in terms of a conflictual and decidedly non-linear trajectory of state formation (chapters four). This makes it possible to acquire a more nuanced

understanding of the actually existing state in Afghanistan. This is an important insight of the research because it demonstrates that violence, militias, and patronage-based politics are placed at the centre of debates on state centralisation and state consolidation, rather than treated as being parallel to the state or as informal power structures, a theoretical conception which is often highlighted in debates on the informal character of statebuilding (see for example Sharan 2013b).[263]

The theoretical and policy implication of the research, namely that military entrepreneurs and militias and their leaders are central to the historicised understanding of the violent foundation of state power has huge contemporary relevance. These insights help to expose the limitations of the liberal position concerning the supposed role of power growing out of legitimacy (the legitimating account of the state) and the myth of the state as the expression of 'common interest', cleanly dissociated from all sectional interests of class, race, religion, etc. As Abrams noted, the state must first and foremost be understood as an agent of coercion and an exercise in 'the legitimating of the illegitimate' (Abrams 1988, 64 & 76).

The liberal model of statebuilding makes two erroneous assumptions, leading to misunderstanding with respect to how and why polities or states form. First, the state is typically perceived as a single actor, supporting the notion behind the state's 'single sovereign' framework. However, historical political economy literature has highlighted more complex and non-linear dynamics of the state formation trajectory. Historically, many states have been founded on the historical balance or distribution of power between contending interests or elite groups. Instead of a dominant, single, unitary organisation, the state has appropriately been characterised as an 'agent of coalitions' (Di John and Putzel 2009, 5).

The second mistake is the assumption that the state has or should have a monopoly on violence. Insights gleaned from the research illustrate that violence devolution, coalition

[263] Attention to the informal character of power and authority and the informal characterisation of the state has been gaining influence in political economy studies emerging from some African contexts. As Meagher argued, this normative and theoretical shift has come about as a result of a shift from Weberian to Tillyan models of state formation (Meagher 2012).

politics, multiple regimes of sovereignty, and complex assemblages of local-global rule are far more common features of state development in many post-conflict countries, rather than the emergence of a dominant, singular and unitary Weberian state. The research built on political economy and anthropological perspectives to demonstrate that state formation was a contested and violent process and most states historically were not monopolists - the Weberian ideal of state monopoly over violence remained beyond the reach of most contemporary states. Instead, they maintained order through brokering arrangements and managed violence by proxy by relying on local militias. Therefore, in the real world, a significant gap remains between the ideal liberal *image* of the state depicting a singular, unitary and autonomous organisation benignly providing services, and the everyday *practices* of coercion which are increasingly enmeshed in transitional processes and draw upon global regimes of power, that ultimately produce partial and fragmented regimes of sovereignty (Migdal and Schlichte 2005, 4).

Such insights are particularly relevant to post-2001 Afghanistan where liberal assumptions of competitive markets and good governance became the basis for the reconstruction of the state after 2001. As previously argued, violent entrepreneurs such as militias were not antithetical to state power and whether they became state-breakers or state-makers depended on the dynamics of political competition among the contending elite groups and the nature of the political economy in which such processes were enmeshed. As in the past the key determinant of political stability will be continued flows of external resources and the existence of a central authority and a politically astute leader like President Karzai to mediate conflicts and hold such extensive patron-client relations together.

It is important to note that while domestic rulers routinely co-opted local sources of power to extend central government control into peripheral areas, colonial and external powers' involvement with tribal and local intermediaries has generally been focused on limited control rather than centralisation of power. While President Karzai used patronage-based politics and reliance on local intermediaries including tribal leaders and local commanders as a centralising tool, external powers such as the US have limited their dealings to imperial control and domination. These contradictory policies have more than once run into collision, as the research illustrated. It is important to clearly

distinguish between these two different dynamics as they result in markedly different political effects: centralisation in the hands of domestic rulers and decentralisation and fragmentation in the hands of foreign military forces.

As the case studies demonstrated, militias are unlikely to disappear anytime soon and it is therefore unrealistic to disarm them, as illustrated in Kunduz, particularly at a time when state reliance on their coercive power has been steadily increasing due to the growing threat of the insurgency in many parts of Afghanistan. As argued in **chapter two**, the liberal perspective that commonly informs contemporary peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions is ahistorical and tends to overlook the constitutive role of coercion, patronage flows and brokerage politics in the emergence of political order in post-interventionary states.

In addition to the important contributions that the research makes to the literature on Afghanistan, processes of state formation and the complex assemblages of discourses, practices and material and symbolic representations that come together to define Western-led liberal interventionism, the research develops important insights into the scholarly representation(s) of Afghanistan. In much of the pre-war literature developed by anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s, the country is viewed through the optic of the tribe as a fractious, isolated and inward-looking society (see for example Dupree 1973). Such discredited models of the tribe are then deployed to understand social and political dynamics in the country today.

There are a number of conceptual and political problems associated with this tendency. First, the simplistic models of the tribe that were developed by anthropologists and historians during this period have positioned the tribe as existing outside the state and often in opposition to it, even though the tribe-state dichotomy and conflictual relationships between the two have been challenged by anthropologists since the 1980s (R. Tapper 1983; R. Tapper 1990; Sneath 2007; Lindisfarne 2013). As argued in **chapter four**, there are many examples of states, including colonial and post-colonial states that deliberately propped up tribal institutions and customary leaders on whom states relied to control territory and populations using a system of indirect rule. The tribal strategies and state policies of previous Afghan rulers have been instrumental in the survival and

political relevance of the tribes. The tribes were essentially the by-product of state policies and part of the central government's apparatus of ruling at the local level (Dorronsoro 2012, 41).

Second, the selective reframing of this literature today has led to the unwarranted celebrations of culture and tradition (and tribes) that are mainly based upon an idealised and reified vision of the past. The main problem with this approach is that it overlooks the major transformations that have taken place in Afghanistan over the past four decades. Today, men of violence – militia commanders and insurgent groups wield much more power than members of the old elite (the royal lineage, tribal khans, and the clergy). This shift in power relations is supported by evidence from the case studies. As noted earlier, while celebratory accounts of customary leaders and institutions make the 'traditional' visible, they render the underlying interests and the hegemonic power relations invisible beneath the discourse of culture. Therefore, such insights help to caution against the excessive celebration of hybridity – and the turn to informal and customary structures as examples of authentic and essentially emancipatory forces in society.

As previously noted, the ALP and its previous iterations were the result of messy compromises and accommodations and involved different actors (foreign forces, local strongmen, central elites) with competing motivations and contradictory interests that changed with shifts in conflict dynamics and military doctrine and political imperatives. This is an important insight of the study, as there is a tendency in some of the historical and anthropological literature on Afghanistan to posit political struggles and contestations over sovereignty in terms of a constant tug-of-war between the discrete orders of state, kinship and religion (D. B. Edwards 1996; D. B. Edwards 2002; Hopkins 2008).

The literature also highlights the recalcitrant nature of traditional elites in their attempts to keep the modernising influences of the state at bay - or in the words of Dupree (1973) rural villagers erect a metaphorical mud curtain to preserve autonomy or in Scott's (2009) terminology, people of the hills or marginal zones intentionally withdraw from the oppressiveness of state-making processes. This spatialisation of power commonly found in the pre-war literature depicts the central government as residing in an urban enclave,

whereas the majority of Afghans live in remote rural villages where they govern themselves according to their own enduring tribal customs and maintain social order in the absence of government. This was understood as a deliberate attempt to evade the state and its predatory demands, and ultimately reified the notion of self-contained communities and insulated governance orders in the periphery (see Barfield 2013).

The thesis sought to reframe the question of politics of place and the spatialisation of power by pointing to the dramatic transformations that took place during the war years, including changes in local patterns of leadership, the rise of military commanders in place of the old elite and the emergence of regionalised politico-military networks and a localised war economy. Moreover, as Wouters argued in his critique of Scott's paradigm of state evasion, the plains provided many essential life-supporting resources that were too important for the people of the hills to ignore (Wouters 2012). Furthermore, their experience of protracted war, predatory militias and perhaps also the service delivery role of the post 2001 Afghan state, means that in many areas there is a higher acceptance of state presence and services in the periphery.

Finally, an important methodological implication of the research findings that resonates across the case studies relates to the need for a more historically informed analysis of violence (and violent entrepreneurs), policing, and processes of state centralisation and state consolidation in the context of liberal interventionism. Moreover, local context and history matters which points to the need for highly contextualised and historically-situated research in zones of conflict at a time when the war-policing assemblage, and peacebuilding and statebuilding more generally are being researched far too infrequently and often written about from afar - and when occasional attempts are made, research is often conducted using remote methodologies, representing a move away from ethnographic fieldwork and remoteness from the world we study (Duffield 2014).

III. Conclusions

This study explores the political and security dynamics surrounding the ALP programme and other government-backed militias in the context of the post-2001 NATO military

involvement and the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. It highlights the complexity and heterogeneity of individual contexts; the varied outcomes of the ALP programme largely depending on how militia programmes intersected with local political landscapes in the three provincial settings: Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz.

In terms of future trajectory, the recent changes in political and economic relations heralded by the 2014 election and the formation of the unity government between the two main rivals, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, are particularly important in the context of post-2014 Afghanistan. The country faces two transitions simultaneously: a security transition after the withdrawal of foreign forces on which the Afghan government and security forces heavily depended in the fight against insurgents, and a political transition with the new unity government in power. As the dramatic changes in the security dynamics in Kunduz in early 2015 showed, further research on local insurgencies and the role of militias in shaping the political and security dynamics at the provincial level is needed to generate fresh insights into the complexity of changing power relations between contending elite groups and the evolving nature of centre-periphery relations after 2014.

It is worth noting that the US intervention in late 2001 began with the promise of liberating a war-weary population and the reconstruction of the country. Yet, by the end of the decade, Western powers appeared disillusioned, the Taliban insurgents remained unbeaten and violence and insecurity continued to pose a major challenge to political stability. As in the last years of Soviet occupation, the US military and its NATO partners have mostly placed their hopes in Afghan security forces, notably on the ability of the ALP to defend the government against the insurgents in rural areas. The post-Soviet period showed that reliance on undisciplined local militias could have huge political costs. Although drawing a comparison with that period is not entirely appropriate, considering the continued pledges of support from Western donors to the Afghan government, the final outcome of the US-led intervention remains unclear.

It is increasingly becoming evident that after a decade of faltering engagement, Western powers seem to have reached the same conclusion that the British reached in the 19th century after two failed attempts to forcibly integrate the country into its imperial fold -

that it was cheaper and easier to control Afghanistan (and its chaos) using strategies of indirect rule. As the British and the Soviets had discovered earlier, the Americans seem to have concluded that it wasn't worth the trouble (and money) to integrate Afghanistan into the broader global liberal order.[264] The alternative option seems to be containment and rule by proxy by relying on a pro-Western central ruler (supported through Western arms and subsidies) and a loose coalition of local commanders and regional strongmen to exert control in *yaghistan*. In a sense, Afghanistan has reverted to its former buffer status on the periphery of more powerful regional states. As long as the US War on Terror and rivalry between regional powers such as India and Pakistan persist, Afghan rulers will continue to accrue geostrategic rents to bolster their power. Competition for power, and national politics more generally, will largely be about the allocation of such rents and the preferential distribution of the largess of patronage to privileged members of the dominant coalition in power.

[264] Gills Dorronsoro alluded to this point in his Anthony Hyman Memorial lecture, 12 March 2014. SOAS, London.

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ANNEX 1: List of interviews

No.	Name and position	Date
1.	Lawrence Devlin, Programme Manager, PTRO	21/09/2011. Kabul
2.	Hadi Marifat, Human Rights & Democracy Organisation	29/09/2011. Kabul
3.	Farid Hamidi, Afghan Human Rights Commission	02/10/2011. Kabul
4.	Martine van Bijlert, Afghanistan Analysts Network	03/10/2011. Kabul
5.	Ali Shah Ahmadzai, Director-General ALP, MoI	04/10/2011. Kabul
6.	Talatbek Masadykov, Director of Political Affairs, UNAMA	16/10/2011. Kabul
7.	International staff member, ICRC Kabul	16/10/2011, 13.05.2012. Kabul
8.	National staff member, UNAMA	18/10/2011. Baghlan
9.	Mullah Alam, ex-Haze commander & tribal leader	18/10/2011. Baghlan & 28/05/2012. Kabul
10.	Habib Shirzai, local journalist	18/10/2011. Baghlan
11.	Rasoul Khan Mohsini, Head of Provincial Council	18/10/2011. Baghlan
12.	Munshi Majid, Governor of Baghlan	19/10/2011. Baghlan
13.	Abdul Samad Stanikzai, head of peace council	19/10/2011. Baghlan
14.	Gran Hewad, researcher, AAN	28/11/2011, 05/12/2011, 31/03/2012. Kabul
15.	Abdul Rahman Rahimi, former police chief of Baghlan	04/12/12011. Kabul
16.	National staff member, ICRC Kabul	05/12/2011. Kabul
17.	Guy Griffen, international staff member, UNAMA	06/12/2011. Kabul
18.	Salahuddin Darwish, local researcher, PTRO	07/12/2011. Kabul
19.	Mohammad Halim Fidai, Governor of Wardak	11/12/2011. Wardak & 15/03/2012, 13/08/2012, 03/11/2012. Kabul
20.	Commander of US Forces, Wardak	12/12/2011. Wardak
21.	Commander of Provincial Augmentation Team, Wardak	12/12/2011. Wardak & 11/02/2012. Kabul
22.	Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, former AP3 commander	12/12/2011. Wardak & 09/08/2012. Kabul
23.	Military secretary of Governor of Wardak	12/12/2011. Wardak
24.	Mohammad Gul Torakai, ALP commander in Nerkh	13/12/2011. Wardak

25.	Abdul Haq, Commander of ALP in Wardak	13/12/2011. Wardak
26.	Mullah Aziz-ur-Rahman Siddiqi, former AP3 commander	17/12/2011. Kabul & 03/03/2012. Wardak
27.	Senior Provincial Council member of Wardak	29/12/2011. Kabul & 17/04/2013. Wardak
28.	Muzafaruddin, former police chief of Wardak	29/12/2011. Kabul
29.	Former Provincial Council member of Wardak	01/01/2012. Kabul
30.	Gen. Mustafa Andarabi, Head of Logistics, MoI	04/01/2012. Kabul
31.	Local journalist #1 (Kunduz)	09/01/2012. Kunduz
32.	Local journalist #2 (Kunduz)	09/01/2012, 11/01/2012. Kunduz
33.	Senior Provincial Council member of Kunduz	10/01/2012. Kunduz
34.	Female Provincial Council member of Kuduz	11/01/2012. Kunduz
35.	International staff member, UNAMA in Kunduz	11/01/2012. Kunudz
36.	Hamdullah Danishi, Deputy Governor	11/01/2012. Kunduz
37.	Local journalist #3 (Kunduz)	11/01/2012. Kunduz
38.	International staff member #1, ICRC Kunduz	11/01/2012. Kunduz
39.	Former Hizb commander in Kunduz	13/01/2012. Kabul
40.	International staff member in Baghlan, UNAMA	23/01/2012. Kabul
41.	Senior secret service officer, Wardak	31/01/2012. Wardak
42.	Gen. Abdul Qayum Baqizio, Police chief of Wardak	31/01/2012. Wardak
43.	Family member of a young man killed by ALP in Jalrez	31/01/2012. Wardak
44.	Political Advisor to ISAF Commander	11/02/2012. Kabul
45.	Local Journalist #1 (Wardak)	06/02/2012. Wardak
46.	ISAF/NATO Focal Point for ALP	08/03/2012. Kabul
47.	Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, National Security Advisor	10/04/2012 & 05/05/2013. Kabul
48.	Local journalist #2 (Wardak)	29/04/2012. Wardak & 04/05/2012. Kabul
49.	Local journalist #3 (Wardak)	30/04/2012. Kabul
50.	Luke Mogelson, New York Times journalist	05/05/2012. Kabul
51.	Sarwar Akbari, local researcher	05/05/2012. Kabul

52.	Local staff member of international organisation	10/05/2012. Kabul
53.	Kevin Sieff, The Washington Post journalist	10/05/2012. Kabul
54.	Resident #1 of Pul-e-Khumri	16/05/2012. Baghlan
55.	Nazar Gul, ALP commander, Dand-e-Shahbuddin	16/05/2012. Baghlan
56.	Pir Mohammad, Peace Council member	16/05/2012. Baghlan
57.	Haji Ghaffar, Uzbek elder	16/05/2012. Baghlan
58.	Nurul Haq, ALP commander, Pul-e-Khumri	16/05/2012. Baghlan
59.	US Special Forces Commander, Dahan-e-Ghori	17/05/2012. Baghlan
60.	Resident #2 of Pul-e-Khumri	17/05/2012. Baghlan
61.	Resident #3 of Pul-e-Khumri	18/05/2012. Baghlan
62.	Resident #4 of Pul-e-Khumri	18/05/2012. Baghlan
63.	Alam Jan, Provincial Council member	18/05/2012. Baghlan
64.	Arbab Faramuz, Pashtun elder, Baghlan-e-Jadid	18/05/2012. Baghlan
65.	2 ALP members from Dand-e-Shahbuddin	19/05/2012. Baghlan
66.	Assadullah Shirzad, Police Chief of Baghlan	19/05/2012. Baghlan
67.	Gulab, ALP Commander in Baghlan	20/05/2012. Baghlan
68.	Amir Gul, Governor of Baghlan-e-Jadid	20/05/2012. Baghlan
69.	Mohammad Kamin, Police Chief, Baghlan-e-Jadid	20/05/2012. Baghlan
70.	Sayed Kamal, ALP Commander, Baghlan-e-Jadid	20/05/2012. Baghlan
71.	Local NGO staff member, Kunduz City	09/06/2012. Kunduz
72.	Afghan Human Rights Commission staff member	10/06/2012. Kunduz
73.	Commander of ALP in Kunduz	10/06/2012. Kunduz
74.	Senior ANP officer in Kunduz City	10/06/2012. Kunduz
75.	Commander of US Special Forces, Chahardara district	11/06/2012. Kunduz
76.	Haji Rustam, Lal Bibi's grandfather	12/06/2012. Kunduz
77.	National staff member, ICRC Kunduz	13/06/2012. Kunduz
78.	International staff member #2, ICRC Kunduz	13/06/2012. Kunduz
79.	Former army officer	13/06/2012. Kunduz
80.	Local resident #1, Kunduz City	14/06/2012. Kunduz
81.	ANP officer in-charge of ALP logistics	14/06/12. Kunduz
82.	Ala Nazar, ALP commander in central Kunduz	14/06/2012. Kunduz

83. Haneef Atmar, ex-minister of interior 26/07/2012, 5/08/2012, 05/11/2012. Kabul
84. Zubair Shafiqi, Editor of Weesa Weekly 14/08/2012. Kabul
85. Rachel Reid, OSI 01/11/2012. Kabul
86. Matthieu Aikins, foreign journalist 03/11/2012. Kabul
87. Jeremy Kelly, foreign journalist 04/11/2012. Kabul
88. Shoib Najafizada, local journalist 04/11/2012. Kabul
89. Mir Ahmad Joyenda, AREU 04/11/2012. Kabul
90. Mirwais Wardak, Director PTRO 04/11/2012. Kabul
91. Maximus Bossarei, ISAF Governance/Development advisor 05/11/2012. Kabul
92. Michael Talbott, ISAF Strategic Advisor 05/11/2012. Kabul
93. Dominic Medley, ISAF Spokesperson 05/11/2012. Kabul
94. Ingrid Kersjes, Rule of Law officer, Dutch Embassy 06/11/2012. Kabul
95. Hans Van de Ven, Military Attaché, Dutch Embassy 06/11/2012. Kabul
96. Tonita Murray, Senior Police Advisor, MoI 06/11/2012. Kabul
97. Jawed Ludin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs 06/11/2012. Kabul
98. ANSO security advisor 06/11/2012. Kabul
99. Maria Abi-Habib, WSJ journalist 06/11/2012. Kabul
100. Wazhma Frogh, Women's rights activist 08/11/2012. Kabul
101. International staff member, ICRC Kabul 08/11/2012, 25/04/2013. Kabul
102. Donald Bolduc, Deputy Commander,
NATO Special Operations Forces Afghanistan 15/11/2012. London
103. President Hamid Karzai 07/05/2013. Kabul
104. Aimal Faizi, President Karzai's spokesperson 07/05/2013. Kabul
105. Nader Nadery, former Human Rights Commissioner 14/04/2013. Kabul
106. Member of Parliament from Kunduz 16/04/2013. Kabul
107. Dr. Sadiq Modaber, Office of Administrative Affairs 16/04/2013. Kabul
108. Relative of victim #1 17/04/2013. Wardak
109. Relative of victim #2 17/04/2013. Wardak
110. Relative of victim #3 17/04/2013. Wardak
111. Relative of victim #4 17/04/2013. Wardak
112. Relative of victim #5 17/04/2013. Wardak

113.	Relative of victim #6	17/04/2013. Wardak
114.	Danielle Bell, Head of Human Rights, UNAMA	18/04/2013. Kabul
115.	Matthew Rosenberg, New York Times journalist	21/04/2013. Kabul
116.	Hussain Fahimi, Provincial Council member, Wardak	21/04/2013. Kabul
117.	Haseeb Humayoon, Political analyst	22/04/2013. Kabul
118.	Afghan Human Rights Commission staff member, Kabul	24/04/2013. Kabul
119.	Senior provincial official, Wardak	06/05/2013. Wardak
120.	Rahimullah Samander, Director of Radio Liberty	25/11/2012. Kabul
121.	Former Hizb commander in Wardak	25/11/2012. Kabul
122.	Sima Samar, head of Afghan Human Rights Commission	29/04/2013. Kabul

ANNEX 2: Map of Afghanistan